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Emotions and social work practice

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Aileen and my daughters Eve, Rosa and Annie with love, laughter and thanks.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who have helped me reach the stage where I am penning my acknowledgements page prior to the final submission of this thesis.

I would like to thank the School of Education, Social Work and Community Education at the University of Dundee for giving me the opportunity to undertake doctoral studies alongside my other roles as a lecturer. In particular I would like to thank my colleagues within the social work discipline who have established an ethos of supporting each other in their research endeavours, as this has helped facilitate an environment where I have been encouraged to develop my ideas and interests.

There have been many practical issues which have presented me with considerable challenges along the way. I would like to thank Iain Gillespie for his assistance with a range of search engines and academic tools which have helped me enormously in my studies. Anne Hutchison helped me unravel the mysteries of developing online surveys with enthusiasm and patience. Grainne Barr has been a vital support in helping with the formatting and presentation of my thesis for which I am very grateful. Professor Divya Jindal-Snape has been an excellent programme director throughout my doctoral studies and has ensured everything has run smoothly.

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Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support and encouragement. My parents have always encouraged me to ask questions, work hard and grasp any educational opportunities that have arisen in my life. Aileen, Eve, Rosa and Annie have provided all the support I could possibly wish for and have been a constant reminder to me about what is important.

Richard Ingram

Signed declaration

I hereby declare that the candidate is the author of the thesis; that, unless otherwise stated, all references cited have been consulted by the candidate; that the work of which the thesis is a record has been done by the candidate, and that it has not been previously accepted for a higher degree.

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Richard Ingram Date

Summary of content

This thesis examines the role that emotions have within social work practice. The key tenets of the literature relating to emotions are considered and a conceptual framework is proposed which will provide a conceptual and definitional underpinning to the thesis. Emotions and emotional intelligence are located within wider social work literature, and links are established with reflective practice, relationships with service users, social work skills, policy, legislation and supervision.

Social workers across a Scottish local authority were asked to respond to a survey questionnaire and a selected cohort from this sample participated in semi-structured interviews based on the emerging themes from the survey. The data reported a complex picture of the role of emotions with a key challenge being the place of emotions within constructs of 'being professional'. There was strong evidence that the relationship based aspects of practice were felt to be important and that emotions often were a key element and a useful tool, but this was counterbalanced by a strong view that the emotional content of practice should be removed from the written articulation of practice and in some cases from supervision. The value of informal support from colleagues was highlighted in terms of 'safety' and accessibility.

The discussion of the results examines the impact of competing contextual factors such as professional narratives and organisational culture on how social workers experience and report the emotional content of their practice, and an 'emotional gap' is identified whereby social workers adopt a dramaturgical response to how they present aspects of their practice. The conceptual framework is considered in relation to the findings, and it is concluded that emotions are an inescapable aspect of the individual and collective experience of social work, in spite of the aforementioned contextual issues. Conclusions and implications for practice are drawn, and a model is developed which identifies the cultural and organisational shift required to reduce the perceived disjuncture between emotions and social work as a profession.

Chapter 1 – Introduction to Thesis

This introductory chapter will provide a clear summary of the contents of this thesis in terms of motivation, literature, methodology, results and analysis. It is intended that it will serve as a useful guide for the reader as a means of contextualising the place and purpose of this research in the context of social work practice and knowledge. The introduction to the content of the chapters provides a brief overview (though not exhaustive) of the key aspects of the thesis.

The initial trigger that ignited my interest in the role of emotions within social work practice came from an unexpected finding within a separate piece of research. As part of the Outcomes in Social Work Education (OSWE) initiative, I became involved in an evaluative study of our MSc Social Work programme at the University of Dundee. The key focus of the study was to evaluate the development of student knowledge across the programme, with a particular focus on decision making in practice (Dowson et al, 2009). An aspect of this research was the thematic analysis of practice studies (detailed academic written accounts of practice) which were coded in terms of the components of decision making that students pointed to when discussing the decisions they make in practice. One of these components was termed 'emotions' and was the only component which was not linked to any of the practice studies analysed. This was a profound finding, and one which seemed at odds with my experience of being a social worker and my

subsequent role as a lecturer and tutor of students in practice learning settings.

Part of my interest was piqued by my experiences of social work practice which were infused with emotional content and which relied upon significant reflection individually and within supervision to explore and manage them. The other key trigger was the anecdotal feedback from students who stated that they did not write about emotions in their written work because they 'felt that we did not want to read that'. When pushed further they noted that it might be seen as a sign of weakness and would not be a robust source of evidence to explain practice decisions and actions. They also reported that their practice learning experiences *were* very emotive and that they had formed empathetic relationships with service users. In terms of the social work programmes at the University of Dundee, it was clear that students were receiving messages about the importance of evidence based practice, and that this seemed to be conflated with a marginalisation of the 'use of self' within practice. These two key strands motivated me to find out what was happening to emotions in practice. It was clear that within the context of social work practice and the centrality of relationships with service users, emotional reactions were a key source of information and in turn a potential prompt from action, yet there seemed to be a tension about the desirability of their presence.

With this blurry picture at the core of my interest in the role of emotions in practice, I chose to focus my thesis on an exploration of the views and experiences of practicing social workers in relation to emotions and social work practice.

1.1 - Literature Review

There are two chapters within the literature review of this thesis. The first chapter is concerned with exploring the concept of emotions to achieve a theoretical and definitional clarity from the outset. The study of emotions has attracted a great deal of interest and inquiry from a range of research perspectives. These include neuroscience, cognitive psychology, sociology and evolutionary theory. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework which is drawn from the review of the literature. It recognises that emotions have a biological underpinning and involve physiological sensations, cognitive appraisals and have an impact on behavior and expression. These elements are common across the literature and highlight the inescapable role that emotions have in the ways individuals make sense of their world, relate to others and respond to events. This is placed within an individual and societal context whereby cultures, norms, rules and experiences contribute to the ways emotions are appraised and expressed. The construct of emotional intelligence is reviewed and incorporated into the conceptual framework as a way of forging clear links with the use of emotions within the relationships at the heart of social work practice. This conceptual framework is a strong

foundation for considering the role of emotions within social work practice as inescapable and significant.

The second chapter of the literature review surveys the key elements of social work practice in which the discussion of emotions seems most relevant. A key aspect of this chapter is the central importance of the relationship based aspects of social work practice. Links are made between the construct of emotional intelligence and the characteristics of positive relationship building. These are also located within the context of national narratives and codes relating to social work which point to a potential congruency between emotions and social work practice. A key aspect of the conceptual framework is the cognitive appraisal element of emotions. This links well with the need for reflection and development of self knowledge, and the role that supervision may have to aide this process is explored. Reflection is considered closely, as is the role this may have in exploring the complexities of practice and the emotions (conscious and unconscious) that may be at play within that. The literature pertaining to social work as a profession is explored to consider how this may potentially impact on the messages and cues that social workers receive about the place of emotions within their practice. This echoes the tensions described at the start of this introduction in terms of the feedback from student social workers, and links well conceptually with the need to consider the impact of wider norms, rules and cultures. The literature review concludes with a statement of the core research questions.

1.2 - Methodology

The methodology chapter presents an account of the key epistemological and methodological underpinnings of this thesis. The research questions are considered within the context of positivist approaches to research and it is recognised that seeking the views of social workers will inherently have a subjective edge. This sense of subjectivity is accepted and valued within this thesis and mirrors the subjectivities that underpin much of the qualitative data associated with the study of emotions more broadly.

The chapter is constructed in a largely chronological fashion which follows the process of the thesis from the development of the initial research questions, development of research tools, ethical approval, data collection and analysis. The approach taken is one which is intended to cast light on how decisions were made in terms of approach. The challenges and opportunities afforded by the adoption of a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews are explored. For example, the 'fixed' nature of questionnaires means that the responses of participants are reliant on the clarity of the questions and the depth and detail of answers can be limited. The use of pre-testing the questionnaire and the adoption of a selection of free-text type response questions ameliorated these issues.

The formal research ethics review process at the University of Dundee is covered and the ethical considerations that pertain to this process are

discussed. In addition to this, I present a reflexive account of the potential and actual ethical dilemmas connected to the research. This considers my role and impact as a researcher and reflects on the potential issues of power and influence within this role. The chapter concludes with an overview of the methods of analysis which underpin the following chapters which report the key aspects of the data.

1.3 - Results

There are three chapters concerned with reporting the key aspects of the data emerging from my research enquiry. The chapters are centered on thematic groups that emerged from the data. This allows the synergies between aspects of the data to be illustrated and the broad range of data to be presented in a manner which attains significant depth and focus. The data is presented in a consistent format, whereby the quantitative data from the surveys is presented first, followed by the qualitative survey data and finally the qualitative data from the interview phase.

The first of the results chapters introduces the profile of the respondents to both parts of the data collection. The cohort is mapped against existing national workforce data and is seen to be 'representative' across indicators such as gender and age. It is reported that there is representation across the key areas of social work service provision and that there was a broad range of role and seniority present. The total cohort of questionnaire

respondents numbered 112 and 14 of these were involved in the subsequent semi-structured interviews. A detailed account of the selection process is provided with the central driver being the establishment of a representative sample across context, gender and viewpoint.

The second results chapter is themed around emotions within practice with service users, and the subsequent recording of these interactions and interventions. There is a resounding sense that empathy and emotions are seen to have a significant part to play in the practice of the social workers. The relationships with service users and the associated emotional attunement and communication were valued by the majority of respondents. This was counterbalanced by the emergence of a view that emotions within practice could/should be managed or removed to achieve objectivity. This is a core tension within the results and one which maps against the familiar debates around technicist constructs of the profession and relationship-based ones. There was less a sense that emotions were not present, but more that they needed to be contained and in some cases removed from practice. Issues of power, influence, expression, management and professional role are explored and reflect the interpersonal and contextual elements of the conceptual framework.

The complex and often contradictory picture was evident in one of the key findings within this thesis, namely the overwhelming view that emotions did not have a place within the written recording of practice (such as casenotes

and reports). This presented a significant chasm between the reality of social work practice and the subsequent written articulation of it. This raised issues relating to the genuineness and transparency of the written aspects of social work. A key aspect of the removal of emotional content from writing was the links to whether it would be 'professional' and credible. This laid the foundation for one of the key themes of the final results chapter (and indeed the thesis) which is the impact of constructs of the social work profession on the perceived permissions and relevance of emotions within social work. This links clearly with the social construction elements of the conceptual framework.

The third results chapter considers the place of emotions in the wider context of the social work profession and its organisational cultures. The issue of 'being professional' was a commonly cited aspect of the debate about the role of emotions. It was often the reason given for the suppression, marginalisation or removal of the emotional content of practice. This is clearly at odds with the conceptual framework which argues that emotions are a significant aspect of how humans make sense of their environments and the events within them. It is similarly at odds with the relationship based constructs of the profession.

The data reflects the impact of organisational and professional norms on the experiences and most notably the presentation of emotions in practice. Supervision emerges as a key area for reflection and exploration of emotions,

though this is variable and reliant on the individual relationship with the supervisor and also the perceived permissions to discuss these elements. The issue of 'safety' emerges as a theme in the sense that it may be viewed as unprofessional or an indicator of personal weakness to explore emotions in supervision. This links with another key finding which was the importance of informal contact with colleagues as a forum to explore the emotional content of practice and undertake supported reflection about practice.

1.4 - Discussion and analysis

The three discussion chapters are based around the following themes:

- Emotions and social work practice
- Exploring emotions: organisational context, supervision and informal supports
- Emotions and the social work professional

The first chapter explores the uses of emotions within the context of social work relationships. The synergies with the literature of relationship based practice (Hennessey, 2011; Ward, 2010) are made and the cognitive and inter-personal aspects of the conceptual framework are seen to be evident within the analysis. The interpersonal context is broadened out to acknowledge the impact of professional roles and rules, and a model is proposed which notes the connections between the establishment of positive relationships with the consequent concrete interventions and outcomes that

occur. This is a stepping stone towards the lowering of the perceived barriers between relationship based and technicist approaches to practice.

Links are made with a range of professional narratives that point to a congruency between the importance of relationships, the associated emotional content, and the professional role. For example, Munro (2011) notes autonomous judgement and the recognition of emotional reactions as a stream of important information for social work assessment and practice. It is noted that social work involves complex situations and relationships and that these require an acceptance and active support of the uncertainty that exists in practice (Ruch, 2010; Cornish, 2011).

The issue of the removal of emotions from written recordings is explored and it is highlighted that the written articulation of practice is as subject to professional codes as direct practice, and it is proposed that the accuracy and authenticity of social work written recording is diminished by the removal of emotions. Links are made to the social construction of emotions and in particular their public expression (Hochschild, 1983) and the need for explicit organisational, educational and professional messages to underline the relevancy of emotions as an aspect of social work practice are identified. This is acknowledged to be alongside other streams of information and knowledge such as theory, research, legislation and social policy.

The second chapter of the discussion is focused on the wider context in which social workers operate. The chapter considers the findings of the thesis within the context of organisational culture and considers the impact that the associated rules and norms may have on the emotional experience of being a social worker. There is a discussion about the tensions between managerialist approaches to practice and the less tangible emotional elements of practice (Ruch, 2011). The role of supervision is explored and a range of models are considered in terms of the challenges and opportunities for exploring emotions (Sudbery, 2002; Smith, 2000; Hafford-Letchfield, 2009). The balance between management functions and the need for reflective opportunities is considered, and it is concluded that if we accept that emotions have a role to play in practice, then by definition any discussion of practice or casework must include it. A partnership model for co-created supervision is developed which seeks to allow greater negotiation and transparency about the permissions to explore emotions, and in turn reduce the variability of experience evident in the results.

The final discussion chapter pulls together many of the key strands of this thesis. It highlights a range of narratives which can usefully be pointed to as a support for the acceptance and inclusion of the emotional aspects of practice. This is important as the chapter explores the apparently repressive influence of perceived messages about the profession and the impact this has on professional presentation (Hochschild, 1983; Turner and Stets, 2005). A dramaturgical model is developed to help unpick the complex layers of

norms, rules, contexts, codes and individual experiences that impact on the emotional worlds of social workers. The use of emotions is contextualised within the paradigm of care and virtue ethics (Houston, 2011) and an example from the data is utilised to illustrate the potential for a 'head, heart, hands and feet' conception of practice.

The chapter contains a reappraisal of the conceptual framework of emotions which was proposed in the literature review. It is noted that the results from the research can be understood helpfully by the key tenets of the framework. It is noted that emotions are a key stream of information for social workers when making sense of their practice. The motivational and behavioural aspects of the framework are borne out in numerous examples from the respondents. This underlines the strong sense of relationships at the heart of practice and the trust and judgements that are contained within them. A key aspect of the framework which is reflected in the results is the impact of individual and organisational norms and cultures on the meaning social workers attach to events and also to the consequent expression and presentation of their emotions. Emotional intelligence was seen to be a helpful factor in terms of establishing reciprocal trusting relationships, but was affected by the wider external pressures.

Finally a model is proposed which pulls together the key aspects of the data and the literature which may allow for the dissonance between emotions and social work practice to be ameliorated. It is heartening that this model draws

upon existing narratives and knowledge about the nature of social work practice. The model unites 4 key spheres of influence:

- Organisational culture
- Supervision, support and reflection
- Social work practice
- Professional frameworks, policy and legislation

The findings of this thesis point to the centrality of emotions within social work. The emotional content of practice is central to the development of positive relationships with service users and the importance of reflection and self knowledge is evident. It has been found that this congruency between emotions and social work is subject to conflicting messages both implicit and explicit which can lead to its marginalisation, suppression and removal in some circumstances. The concluding model identifies the key sources of support to shift the perceived construct of social work as a profession to one which values, explores and uses emotions.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review - Conceptual framework of emotions

2.1 – Emotions: setting the scene

When seeking a conceptual framework with which to understand and examine emotions, one is confronted with a plethora of perspectives and approaches which can seem to make the concept rather diffuse if taken in isolation. This chapter seeks to review the key tenets of the literature relating to emotions and in doing so establish a coherent and accommodating framework. Indeed, it will be seen that the boundaries between perspectives have been lowered in recent years and that emotions can be viewed within a multi-modal framework regardless of one's particular area of research interest. There is still not a fully accepted concept of emotions, and Barrett (2012) notes that despite the volume of research from across disciplines, it is still difficult to unite the 'hard' streams of data (i.e. neurological imaging) and the 'soft' streams of data (i.e. the subjective explanations of individuals) to create a cohesive whole.

This chapter will begin by looking at emotions from an evolutionary perspective (Darwin, 1890) and note the early inclusion of physiology, cognition and purpose within the construct of emotions. These facets will be explored further and a clearer sense of definitions and the landscape of emotions research will be provided. The chapter will then explore the

contributions from neuroscience to our understanding of the role of brain function and further underpin the important role of appraisal. The appraisal of the *meaning* that emotional responses have is a crucial element of the discourse about emotions, and this opens the door for considering how these meanings are individually and culturally nuanced and generated. Emotions will be seen to be functional and purposeful, which will helpfully link with relationship building and motivation. The expression and presentation of emotions are a key element, and are further influenced by context, culture and experience. The chapter will conclude with a conceptual framework of emotions which will underpin this thesis.

2.2 – Emotions: evolution towards cognition

Charles Darwin (1890) contributed significantly to our understanding of emotions from an evolutionary perspective. His contention was that emotions have their roots in early animal life and have evolved as a means of alerting us to dangers and situations which require us to react and respond. Jenkins et al (1998) recognise that this introduces us to the potential functionality of emotions. By this I mean that emotional responses and their associated behaviors can serve a crucial purpose in terms of our needs and goals. For example, they note that the familiar paradigm of 'freezing with fear' may be understood within the context of making oneself less visible to danger, yet this physiological reaction then becomes viewed as a universal expression of fear. Howe (2008) writing in the context of social work notes

that Darwin's focus on the physiological sensations of emotions are crucial for giving individuals fast links to sets of behaviours that will help us to respond appropriately and also to guide us to focus on what is important. These ideas will be explored further in this chapter within neurological, cognitive and sociological perspectives on emotions.

Darwin (1890) introduced the notion of emotional expression (to be returned to repeatedly in this chapter) as a key component. He suggested that some emotional responses appear to be involuntary physiological reactions to stimuli that are linked to hereditary reactions to danger. For example, one may experience fear whist watching a horror film, despite knowing that it is a fictional portrayal of events. He noted that young infants can exhibit fear responses to stimuli such as loud rattles at an age and stage where this can't be rooted in direct experience. This is a key facet of the claims for certain emotional responses being inherited through evolution. He notes that there is a habitual element to emotional expression which develops over time and (as with the horror film example) may in fact not even have a clear purpose.

Turner and Stets (2005) highlight the influential legacy of Darwin's research around the consistency of facial expression across cultures. This baton was picked up again by Ekman (1977) who explored emotional expression across cultures and was able to identify commonalities that exist regardless of cultural norms and context. This linkage to Darwin is crucial and represents a key foundation stone for considering emotions to be at one level a

universal phenomenon. This approach to considering emotions across cultures moves the thinking about emotions into an area of context, norms and culture which will be examined in more detail later in this chapter. Furthermore, Jenkins et al (1998) note that Darwin's notion that there are universal elements relating to the biological and genetic sources of emotions opened the door for the neurological work undertaken in the latter stages of the 20th Century (see Damasio, 2000)

The psychologist William James (1890) wrote about emotions at the same time as Darwin. He emphasised that emotions cannot be detached from the physiological sensation they are linked to. He described these as "*sensational processes*" (ibid, p28) which add the depth to what otherwise would merely be one dimensional perceptions. He noted that whist emotions usually have an 'object' these may not necessarily have to be present but can be simply thought about or remembered. This begins to open the door for considering emotions in terms of conscious and unconscious spheres. The influential James-Lange theory of emotions suggests that an event or stimulus provokes a physiological reaction and our interpretation of this reaction identifies the emotion involved.

Schachter and Singer (1962) developed the two-factor theory of emotion which was inspired by the emerging notion of appraisal. Their contention was that an emotion is created by a physiological arousal followed by a labelling of it that is drawn from available information and cues. Briefly, this

research involved participants being injected with medication that would raise blood pressure and were given differing explanations for what they would feel (for example that one would feel angry). These suggestions provided persuasive cues for the labelling of the emotion. Maslach (1979) built on the research of Schachter and Singer (1962) and found that this was not always reproducible and that suggested cues often led to confusion and negative emotions. We will see however that the notion of appraisal and labelling of emotions is still very evident in emotional discourse today (Barrett, 2012).

The above discussion already touches on concepts which require defining at this stage of the chapter. Turner and Stets (2005) note that emotions, feelings and moods can often be used interchangeably across the literature relating to emotions. Jenkins, Oatley and Stein (1998) recognise that these are all part of what might be called the broad landscape of emotional discourse. Damasio (2000) suggests that feelings are private and internal rather than expressed. Turner and Stets (2005) note that for something to constitute a feeling, it must by definition be consciously *felt*. Howe (2008) suggests that feelings also apply to the physiological aspect of emotional arousal, and that it becomes an emotion once cognitively appraised and labeled. For the purposes of this thesis feelings will refer to the consciously felt emotions only, although these may well be unclear and ambiguous to the individual experiencing them. The term emotion will also include unconscious aspects of emotions and be useable across the various paradigms discussed

in this literature review. The notion of moods will be referred to less frequently, but can be understood to represent longer term emotional states and dispositions which may be less affected by changing events or stimuli, but nevertheless are part of what the literature (and indeed respondents to the inquiry of this thesis) view as part of their emotional world. Moods it is argued impact on the aforementioned *appraisal* of events and impact on which aspects we are likely to focus on (Davidson, 1994).

The preceding discussion introduces the key foundations for the multi-faceted conceptualisation of emotions and the associated schools of thought that emerged during the 20th Century. We will now explore the key aspects of these perspectives in greater detail.

2.3 – Emotions: a neurological perspective

Damasio (1994) and LeDoux (1993) undertook studies examining the decision making of individuals with damage to their amygdala which provides a useful indication of the pivotal role of this part of the brain in terms of emotions. LeDoux (1993) proposed that the amygdala is the central emotional hub of the brain, based on the observation that individuals who experience damage to this part of the brain display significantly impaired emotional responses. Damasio (1994) suggested that damage to the amygdala led to individuals losing prior emotional learning (i.e. impact of behaviour on others) and in turn making decisions in their lives that led to

negatives outcomes (i.e. relationship breakdown). It was noted that there was no impact on IQ scores. This contributes to the view that the amygdala has a specific neural function relating to the processing of emotions and contributes to the concrete evidence base that emotions have a clear neurological basis. This research also notes the role of emotional learning which allows for links to be made to social context and the impact of prior experiences and cultural scripts. LeDoux (1997) considers these findings in the context of the familiar conditioning research of Pavlov. He notes that when individuals are conditioned through repeated exposure to negative stimuli to avoid a particular object, the emotion of fear is eventually removed and it is simple avoidance behaviour by association. However, it is noted that as time goes by the conditioned responses may diminish and brief re-exposure to the negative stimuli is required. It is at this point that the amygdala draws upon previous emotional experience to guide the response.

LeDoux (1997) identifies the amygdala and the neo-cortex areas of the brain as key. The amygdala is the area of the brain that allows us to make quick emotional responses. The neo-cortex is the area of the brain that injects reason and evaluation to initial emotional response. These processes happen in conjunction with each other and from a neurological perspective present an initial 2 step process of physiological response followed by a cognitive appraisal process. For example, one may hear a loud bang and your amygdala allows for an immediate response in terms of one's safety (move away quickly), whilst the cortex area helps us then consider where the bang

came from and in turn appraise the degree of risk involved. This is a useful underpinning for considering the cognitive aspects of emotions in relation to the neurological aspects. Pennebaker (1980) further underlined this physiological and cognitive process in his experiments which involved the administration of chemicals to participants to induce the physiological symptoms of fear. What was found was that participants did not report feelings of fear despite the physiological sensation of it. This underlines the role of appraisal and judgement.

Damasio, Tranel and Damasio (1991) undertook research looking at the impact of damage to the frontal lobe region of the brain on emotions. They found that there was a loss of somatic markers (previously developed associations between physiological reactions and emotions) which help us to think about the complex situations. They draw links with the notion of 'gut feeling' which draws on previous knowledge and experiences to help us identify and trigger emotional responses and reasoning. Again, this research allows for the links between neurology and wider socially constructed and informed aspects of emotions to co-exist and interact.

Lane and Nadel (2000) in the preface to their edited book on the cognitive neuroscience of emotions noted that the developments in terms of brain imaging and the consequent blossoming of the evidence base for understanding the workings of the human brain, has raised the concept of emotions to an observable and in turn concrete concept that ranks as

conceptually clearly as the mental processes such as memory and attention. This area of research has facilitated the connection between emotions as a physiological reaction and a cognitive process. Lane et al (2000) note that this is a crucial contribution to moving the view of emotions away from being simply a physiological process to which the individual has no control to one which allows for cognitive processes such as appraisal and emotional expression to be included within the concept of emotions. We will return to the balance between emotion and reason within the next chapter of the literature review.

Turner and Stets (2005) writing from a sociological viewpoint argue that the biological basis of emotions can co-exist, as the neurological processes which trigger emotional responses are then understood, expressed and constrained by the social contexts within which they are experienced. Despite their sociological emphasis, they concede that emotions cannot be viewed purely as a socially constructed entity, as they acknowledge that the physiological aspect of emotions can in some circumstances be so profound that they override social scripts and norms (i.e. when the intensity of anger erupts publicly). There may be times when we respond to emotional memories and may need to be told externally about our behaviors (i.e. being defensive within an interaction). They also concede that unconscious emotions rather than conscious ones are problematic from a sociological standpoint as they appear by definition to occur outside of the culturally nuanced conscious sphere. For example, a social worker may subconsciously avoid a particular

service user due to unconscious memories. These remain an internal process unless they are brought to light through reflection or prompting of others (Rosenberg, 1990). Turner and Stets (2005) note that the binary debate between biological and cultural perspectives is unhelpful, as both aspects are key components of emotions. Simply put, their argument is that the initial physiological response is then understood within the context of cultural scripts, goals and meanings and that neither can exist without the other. Barrett (2012) concurs with this view and criticised the continuing tendency to seek divisions within research.

Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1996) propose the communicative theory of emotions. They argue that the emotions are messages that originate in our brains that reflect our goals and priorities which in turn guide our behaviors. This brings in the notion of the appraisal of the neurological and physiological messages. For example, the emotion of happiness may encourage a social worker to continue to engage with a family in the way they are currently doing, or alternatively the emotion of fear may drive them to withdraw from their current situation. Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1996) recognise that certain emotions such anger, sadness, fear and happiness could be considered as free floating and need not be consciously attached to an object. They identify another stratum of emotions which would seem to require a conscious object: these include hatred, disgust and love.

2.4 – Emotions: cognition and appraisal

Rosenberg (1990:5) *"we do not simply 'feel' an emotion, we 'think' an emotion"*

From the work of James (1890) onwards, the role of cognition has secured a place within the conceptual framework of emotions. As noted throughout this chapter, the role of thought and the timing and ways in which it is involved in emotional processing and expression varies. What is constant is that the physiological and neurological arousal is most often linked with an appraisal of the nature of the emotions and the subsequent significance that this has for us as individuals. Le Doux (1997) noted the intertwined relationship between the rapid response of the amygdala and the secondary reasoning of the cortex areas of the brain. He noted that these processes bring together the physiological and the cognitive. Turner and Stets (2005) suggested cognitive approaches to conceptualizing emotions are concerned with the appraisal and judgements we apply to felt emotions. Rosenberg (1990) notes that this potentially moves emotional processing into a reflexive arena, whereby we add depth and detail to the physiological aspects of emotion by thinking about the relationship between our emotions, sensations and thoughts. It is through this process that we develop a keener sense our 'self' and in turn can begin to manage and regulate our emotions accordingly.

Lane et al (2000) note that cognitive appraisals are most commonly conscious although not necessarily so. They recognise that conceptually this presents a challenge to the cognitive neuroscience perspective as the boundaries between the unconscious and conscious are not clear and easily definable. They argue that the definition of cognition should embrace both aspects of consciousness and that these are linked to wider neural processes such as memory and perception.

Lazarus & Lazarus (1994:151) state that "*an emotion is a personal life drama, which has to do with the fate of our goals in a particular encounter and our beliefs about ourselves and the world we live in. It is aroused by an appraisal of the personal significance or meaning of what is happening in that encounter*".

This fundamental centrality to human experience suggests that emotions are purposeful and operant (Lazarus and Lazarus 1994; Davidson 1994: Turner and Stets, 2005). Emotions are aroused when a person perceives that something they desire comes to fruition or is compromised. The emotional response will in turn be dependent on how we assess the potential impact of a circumstance on our perceived goals. This goals orientated view of emotions is echoed by Goleman (1995), who makes explicit links between goal attainment and emotional awareness and regulation. To purely focus on goals runs the risk of overlooking key processes involved. For example, if a social worker is running late when traveling to an initial home visit to a

family, it is the process of a delayed journey that arouses an emotional reaction rather than the *goal* which is the home visit. This illustrates that there may be implicit and explicit variables at play when emotional reactions are experienced.

Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) state that our ego or self identity is developed through experience and the associated emotional reactions. They describe ego as being at the core of an individual's personal view of the world, and as such emotional responses arise from events and circumstances that impact upon it. Clearly, this suggests there is a cognitive process at play which helps us determine what elements of an event are important and in turn what is potentially at stake. This appraisal of events will in turn feed into decisions about subsequent actions (Turner and Stets, 2005). To return to the example of the social work home visit, the worker may hold a strong belief about the importance of reliability and the development of trust with service users (Lishman, 2009). It is this aspect of their professional identity and their appraisal of its importance that may guide their emotional response and subsequent actions. Lazarus (1991) suggests that appraisal is not a static process and we can re-appraise situations continually and our emotional responses and associated actions change accordingly. This clearly has links to reflection and reflexivity which will be picked up in a range of social work contexts within this thesis.

Jenkins, Oatley and Stein (1998) concur with this goals orientated view of emotions and state that if we are aware of an emotion then we by definition are aware that it is related to something which is of importance to us, whether negative or positive. This process of appraisal requires us to attach a label to our emotions and in turn this opens up a range of options in terms of our subsequent actions. Fridja (1988) approaches emotions from a cognitive psychology perspective and suggests that emotions must have a *situational meaning*. This adds a layer of complexity onto the notion of appraisal as it notes that we can't simply identify an event/object and conclude that a particular emotion will be evoked, rather we need to explore the meaning that it has in relation to wider goals and events. For example, a social worker working with a young person whose grandparent has just died would need to seek an understanding of the meaning that this event has within the life of the young person. It may be that the grandparent regularly looked after the young person and that a number of secondary losses (Currer, 2007) relating to their care add to the depth of the emotional response of grief. Alternatively, it may be that they had a very distant relationship and the impact on the young person is reduced. Even this example makes some casual assumptions about context and likely emotional impact, and as such underlines the need for a flexible and individualised approach to considering emotions and appraisal of meaning. In terms of social work practice, this sits very comfortably with the ethos of seeking the views of service users and relationship based approaches to practice (Hennessey, 2011).

Searle (2010) notes that the meanings that we apply to events, and in turn our emotional responses to them, are subjectively constructed individually and culturally. Barrett (2012) offers an interesting example of our reactions to weeds and flowers. She notes that the low status we afford weeds changes its social meaning and in turn drives our feelings and behaviour towards it. This brings in the impact of social construction and consensus which contribute to our appraisals of events and stimuli. This same process can be applied within a social work context in the sense that our thresholds regarding the risk of substance misuse and parenting are driven in part by the labels we attach to both activities and their perceived degree of compatibility.

Fridja (1998) concurs with Lazarus (1991) in terms of appraisal being an ongoing process. Fridja suggests that individuals undertake primary and secondary appraisals, which produce an evolving and subjective management of emotions. For example, a social worker working with a service user who is fearful about the losses incurred by a move into residential care, will help support them during the initial emotional reaction of fear but will also have an eye to supporting the service user to consider (secondary appraisal) the possible ameliorating benefits. This example reflects the complex multi-faceted range of emotions and emotional appraisals that may be undertaken in any given situation.

Clore and Ortony (2000) note that appraisal may happen at a conscious or unconscious level. They refer to a 'bottom up' approach to appraisal which is a conscious process whereby our emotions reflect our goals, preferences and experiences. Alternatively they suggest a 'top down' approach which involves emotions being triggered by previous experience and indeed previous appraisal. For example, a key aspect of attachment theory is the notion that prior learning can unconsciously shape our emotional reactions to events later in life due to having developed emotional models. This clearly links to the need to seek opportunities to reflect upon and explore the sources of our reactions and associated actions. Rosenberg (1990) talks of the importance of prior social learning when appraising events on an emotional level. Rosenberg suggests that this gives individuals an *emotional logic* achieved through linking previous experiences to a presenting event/object.

2.5 – Emotions: social construction, culture and expression

Having established that emotions have a physiological and cognitive aspect, it is important to consider emotions within the wider contexts in which individuals operate. In the context of this thesis, this is extremely important as I seek to explore the emotional aspects of being a social worker specifically within the *context* of social work practice. This broadens out emotions to consider more specifically the expressed or presented emotion within a social context.

Turner and Stets (2005) state that a sociological perspective of emotions views emotions as being social constructed in the sense that they are responses to culture and norms. They accept that this social construction operates in conjunction with the biological aspects of emotions but that the meaning that emotions attain and their importance within society are by definition a social entity. They place particular emphasis on the role of culture (in the context of this thesis organisational culture will emerge as a key theme) and how this impacts on the meanings we apply to circumstances, and in turn the manner in which we express the ensuing emotions. They sum up their view in the following extract:

> *"Emotions are the driving force behind the commitments to culture. Indeed emotions are what give cultural symbols the very meanings and power to regulate, direct, and channel human behaviour and to integrate patterns of social organisation."*
>
> Turner and Stets (2005, p292)

The notion that cultural context is crucial can seem to challenge the sense that there is a universality to emotions. Janowiack and Fischer (1992) undertook a cross-cultural study of folkloric materials to examine the universality of the emotion of love. The findings strongly pointed towards its universality, but noted that the opportunity to experience the emotion and the ways in which the emotion was expressed was the aspect that was impacted by culture. This is useful when considering the social work context, as the emotions engendered by practice such as happiness and fear may be common across all contexts, but may be subject to variance in organisational

cultures in terms of how these are expressed and/or recorded. This begins to form the links between professionalism and emotions which will be discussed later. A further example of cross cultural research was undertaken by Ekman and Friesen (1971) who explored the universality of facial expressions and associated emotions between New Guinea and western comparisons. They found a strong sense that there were universal emotionally driven facial expressions (i.e. smiling and happiness), but the event/object that might elicit the emotion varied across cultures. In relation to social work this again notes that there may be something specific about the professional context which may impact upon which emotions social workers feel and how they are expressed. Barrett (2012) also usefully points out that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between emotions and behaviors. So, for example the emotions of fear may be linked to defensiveness, flight or freezing. This further muddies the waters when seeking comparability across cultures or indeed between individuals.

There are useful links to be made with the work of Hochschild (1983) in her seminal book *The Managed Heart*. Hochschild considered the 'act' of presenting oneself in line with the requirements and culture of the context in which you are employed. She vividly drew on the experiences of flight attendants and the strong organisational culture of customer service and the associated emphasis on smiling. It was noted that flight attendants are required to smile regardless of their real feelings and emotional reactions to their work or the people with whom they interact. She termed the

underlying process of emotional management and presentation as *emotional labour*. This labour intensifies when there is a tension between required behaviors and felt emotions. For example, if we consider the example of the balance between the technical/rational and relationship-based aspects of social work as a feature of the cultural context in which social workers operate, then we can begin to consider Hochschild's concept of 'acting' in relation to the need for considering one's professional presentation. Mann (2004) suggests that emotional labour entails either faking one's emotions, hiding one's emotions or managing one's emotions to fit with one's context.

Hochschild (1983) noted two distinct types of acting within any given cultural context:

- *Surface acting*- when one tries to deceive another by making them think we are feeling something we are not.
- *Deep acting* – when one tries to train oneself to act in a particular way that is underpinned by a set of rules or norms.

At the heart of her work has been a focus upon how professionals control the expression of their emotions in their attempts to conform to cultural or *emotion ideologies* around emotional responses to social phenomena and the expression of these responses in various social contexts. She argues that the acquisition of these emotion ideologies is achieved through the socialisation processes that characterise the different spheres of activity in which individuals interact. Hochschild (1983) theorises that within any given

society the totalising effect of multiple emotion ideologies is the presence of an *emotion culture* at the macro level (Turner & Stets, 2005).

Hochschild's work makes a bold assumption that one's emotions can be readily interchanged with the requirements of the organisation in which you work. Bolton & Boyd (2003) repeated Hochschild's research of flight cabin crews to explore whether workers were able and/or willing to trade their own individual emotional responses for those desired of the organisation for which they worked. They were driven by an interest in the apparent marginalisation of private/individual emotions (previous to Hochschild's work the most common paradigm of emotions) in the face of an overpowering social context. What they were interested in was whether the smile of the flight attendant was their own smile or the company's smile. What they found was that the workers were emotionally dexterous and were able to locate themselves within the organisational context rather than fully give themselves over to it. Bolton and Boyd (2003) noted that participants talked of secondary socialisation into the norms and codes of the organisations but also found space for their long held personal beliefs, experiences and norms from their primary socialisation. This resonates with the idea of *emotional displays* suggested by Rosenberg (1990) whereby the emotions we display can be distinctly purposeful and strategic. This is potentially very interesting for social work as it notes the place that cultural rules such as Codes of Practice may have in terms of impacting on emotional responses and the impact of personal values and experiences. This mirrors the familiar debates

in social work about the balance between personal and professional values (Dominelli, 2009). A further finding from the research that is pertinent to this discussion was respondents identified that their actions were often driven by internal emotional responses which made them 'go the extra mile' regardless of organisational rules or norms.

Zapf (2002) noted that there are professions where the organisational cultural requirement is that emotional expression should be genuine. This clearly has links to social work as genuineness is regularly cited a desirable characteristic for social workers to possess (Lishman, 2009). This will emerge an important debate within this thesis as it will be when there is dissonance between felt emotion and the expressed emotion that emotional labour occurs. Bolton (2000) explored the accounts of nurses about their experiences of emotional expression within their work. An interesting finding was that respondents reported that in circumstances where positive reassurance was being offered to individuals whose prognosis was poor or who presented challenging behaviour, the nurses were able over-ride the apparent dissonance between emotion and action by drawing on their own motivations to be nurses. Simply put, they were able to locate a congruency between the expression of calmness and their professional role, despite perhaps internally experiencing different emotions. This suggests that the contextual issues can be multi-layered and that dissonance can be ameliorated by drawing on wider socio-professional constructs. This clearly has a potential resonance within the social work context.

Rosenberg (1990) suggests that there may be a further aspect to the influence of cultural and contextual expectations upon our expression and our actions, namely *social consensus*. Given the above discussion which introduces the potential impact of organisational culture, it suggests that we need to take cognisance of the influence of observation and role-modeling within teams and organisations and the potential this has for encouraging individuals to express their emotions in line with those of others around them. Within a social work context this can set the tone for how and where emotions are expressed, but may also present an opportunity for organisational culture to purposefully and powerfully create an environment which reduces the potential for the professional dissonance considered within the work of Hochschild.

2.6 – Emotions: interpersonal purposes

Howe (2008) places emotional discourse within the context of social work practice and notes that emotions have a function and purpose and draws on the Darwinian notion of survival instincts which drive us forward or lead us to retract from situations and stimuli. Collins (1990) talks about *emotional energy* in the sense that emotions may give us cues which prompt action. Turner and Stets (2005) explore this from a sociological standpoint in terms of the link between emotions and *motivation* to respond to situations in terms of social norms and scripts. Jenkins, Oatley and Stein (1998) suggest

that emotions can give us a *social role* in the sense that emotions give us a platform (possibly even a mandate on occasion) to act in a particular manner. For example, feelings of fear within the context of a home visit provide social workers with a role to make further assessments and enquiries to explore the source of this. If we link back to Howe (2008) then we can begin to see that emotions may have a significant contribution to make to the actions and intensity of social workers in practice.

It is useful in the context of the above comments regarding the purposeful and active nature of emotions to make links to the expressive aspect of emotions. Rosenberg (1990) notes that emotional expression is distinct from emotional display in that expression is less intentional and managed (i.e. the loss of eye contact due to embarrassment) and emotional display has an intentional and purposeful edge (i.e. speaking in a calm voice to offer support to someone in distress despite feelings of anxiety). Clearly this has links to the preceding discussion about the social construction of emotions and associated presentation, but also narrows it down to finer skills. This clearly has a resonance for social work practice in the sense that details such as eye contact are deemed a key aspect of the skills toolkit and the building blocks of trusting relationships (Lishman, 2009: Ingram, 2012).

Howe (2008) notes that emotions impact upon the mind, body and face and as such quickly move from an intrapersonal level to an interpersonal level. This is crucial in terms of thinking about emotions within a social work

context as emotional communication through facial expression and body language create the environment for a two-way emotional dialogue between worker and service user. This interpersonal aspect of emotions is a key aspect of relationship based conceptions of social work (Hennessey, 2011). Zapf (2002) suggests the notion of *sentimental work* which refers to emotional displays which are intended to create supportive and empathetic connections between people to achieve wider goals. In the context of social work this may involve a social worker speaking and presenting visually in a calm manner in order for a service user to recognise empathic understanding of their circumstances from the worker and in turn encouraging further exploration and intervention. Barrett (2012) notes that emotions can also be used within interpersonal communication to express intent or explain physical actions. For example, to state "I am feeling angry" provides a social signal of potential behavior and an explanation for current actions. This is the communicative element, but Barrett goes on to note the influence this can have then on the emotions and actions of others. This creates an emotional discourse that affects both parties.

The preceding points bring into play the need for individuals not only to think about their emotions and to do so within particular socio-cultural contexts, but also to consider these purposefully within the context of interpersonal relationships. This discussion leads us to the concept of emotional intelligence and its increasingly visible profile within emotion discourse and research. The following section will explore the key features of this construct

as a way of locating emotions as an active element of practice, whilst taking cognisance of the preceding discussion about the nature of emotion itself.

2.7 - Emotions: psychoanalytic perspectives

This chapter has noted that emotional arousal is often associated with identifiable stimuli or objects. In these circumstances it is possible for individuals to be able to articulate the source of their response, the physiological impact this has and the meaning which they apply to it. Trevithick (2003) would argue that the 'known' elements of emotional experience are only part of the picture. Trevithick suggests psychoanalytic perspectives have much to offer in relation to highlighting and unpicking the less visible and often unconscious emotional worlds of individuals.

Psychoanalytic theories have their roots in the work of Freud (see Freud, 1957) and in particular the emphasis on understanding and recognising the impact of previous experiences (often repressed or unconscious) on current responses and behaviours. Ruch (2009) acknowledges a debt to the work of Freud in the context of social work practice and reflection. The notion that individuals possess unconscious emotional markers and experiences is congruent with idea that emotions are inescapably part of the private world of an individual (Barrett, 2012). Ruch (2009) notes that unconscious emotional drivers are a crucial source of information for social workers which

help them understand the dynamics of relationships and their responses to different situations.

John and Trevithick (2012) suggest that in the context of social work, supervision has a role to play in allowing social workers to explore and uncover the emotions at play in their relationships with service users. The work of Bion (1962) is hugely influential in this area. Bion highlighted the notion of 'containment' as being crucial in helping individuals gain emotional insight. Simply put, this refers to the conditions which allow for the integration of thinking and feeling. For example, John and Trevithick suggest that encouragement and reframing are two possible aspects of a containing relationship. In a sense, Bion (1962) is expanding the dynamics of a psychotherapeutic relationship to other contexts. Bion was particularly interested in the anxieties felt by individuals when involved in group processes. He highlighted the role of group facilitator as crucial in terms of identifying anxieties within a group but also, and most crucially, explicitly naming them and highlighting them to the group members. Ruch (2009) argues that bringing the unconscious emotional sphere under a spotlight is essential to avoid the negative effects of emotional suppression. For example, Hair (2012) found that social workers who lacked opportunities to explore their feelings in supervision experienced higher levels of stress. It is easy to see the linkages with a containing supervisory relationship and the cognitive aspects of emotional appraisal and understanding discussed previously. Ruch (2009) notes that the ability to gain insight into the

unconscious and less rational aspects of behaviour are crucial in terms of understanding one's own emotional responses, but also the ability to understand the emotional world of the people with whom we work.

Another key feature of the psychoanalytic perspective is the emphasis on the interpersonal aspects of emotions. In the previous section it was noted that emotions can be purposeful and can be influential and communicated within interactions. Agass (2002) highlights the important concepts of transference and counter transference within relationships. Transference refers the tendency for individuals to try to make current relationships 'fit' with the dynamics of previous relationship experiences. Being aware of this in a social work context is useful for workers in considering their own responses and most crucially unlocking knowledge about the experience and behaviours of service users. Counter transference refers to the reciprocal two-way nature of relationships. In the context of the social worker/service user relationship, the worker may find themselves reacting emotionally in ways which provoke anxiety or discomfort within themselves. If such emotional behaviour is unpicked and examined, then the social worker has the opportunity to gain insight into previously unconscious emotional drivers and in turn feed the knowledge of this back into their interactions.

The impact of social context and associated cultures and norms (Turner and Stets, 2005) has been picked up earlier in this chapter. It is the apparent marginalisation of these wider influences which have been highlighted as a

weakness when applying psychoanalytic perspectives. Bower (2005) noted that issues of power, coercion and organisational structures must be included within any analysis of a social worker's behaviour and role. John and Trevithick (2012) note that current conceptions of relationship based practice integrate the inter and intra personal aspects within the wider context in which practice takes place. In terms of the conceptual framework proposed in this chapter, it is noted that unconscious emotional drivers are an important part of a broader conceptualisation of emotions.

John and Trevithick (2012) suggest that genuine relationships require the unconscious emotional elements to be brought into the light. This will be picked up further in the next section which looks at emotional intelligence and the need to tune into the emotional worlds of service users, whilst simultaneously acknowledging and managing one's own emotional responses. In terms of the conceptual framework of emotions, psychoanalytic theory reminds us that the elusive unconscious aspects of emotions are no less pertinent in our interactions and behaviours, and lay the foundations for the need for reflection and supervision. These themes will be picked up in the next chapter.

2.8 – Emotions: emotional intelligence

The construct of emotional intelligence has emerged in different forms since the early nineties. The construct has both popular appeal and increasingly an

applied theoretical and academic profile. It may be that the plethora of associated benefits and outcomes claimed to be linked to the possession of emotional intelligence are a key part of this popularity. The areas of impact that emotional intelligence has been linked with include life opportunities, stress management, relationship issues, job retention and leadership skills. There are three key conceptual interpretations of emotional intelligence which place particular emphasis on differing elements, and in turn have an impact on their applicability and measurement. These can be described as the *personality* model, the *ability* model and a *blended trait/ability* model.

The personality model is most closely associated with the work of Bar-On (1997, 2006) who views emotional intelligence as a facet of personality. Bar-On's research originated in a community mental health setting, with a focus on how patients differ in terms of their well-being and their happiness. Within this model, emotional intelligence is concerned with understanding oneself and being able to adapt and cope with changes in environment and contact.

Mayer, DiPaulo & Salovey (1990) suggest that emotional intelligence consists of an individuals' ability to be aware of their own emotional reactions to various stimuli and their abilities to manage their responses to such stimuli. They suggested that this balance of awareness and control allows individuals to make decisions with increased clarity and confidence. In addition to this self regulation and awareness in relation to reaction and response to stimuli, they suggested that an ability to identify emotional responses in others is a

key aspect of emotional intelligence. These abilities are further linked to an individual's ability for empathic understanding and their skills in communication. From these attributes it is argued that positive relationships and outcomes may flow (Lishman, 2009). Goleman (1995) suggests that the attributes proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) help to explain why individuals who do not score highly in IQ measures may still achieve more professionally than those who have a high IQ scores. This emphasises the interpersonal aspects of what contributes to successful relationships that underpin wider activities such as employment. Simply put, the suggestion is that emotional intelligence adds a greater depth to how an individual may perform and in turn affects our understanding of what may contribute to actions and outcomes.

Mathews, Zeidner, and Roberts (2002*)* suggest that the egalitarian nature of emotional intelligence made the concept more attractive culturally and politically. By 'egalitarian' they meant that the construct of emotional intelligence emphasises a range of traits and abilities that transcend variables such as socio-economic status and education experience, which were previously seen as key indicators of life opportunities. This creates an inclusive and aspirational concept which can be applied and targeted at a plethora of contexts and across socio-economic groups. The global appeal of the concept clearly has roots in the notion that emotions are a universally experienced phenomenon (Darwin, 1890; Ekman and Frieson, 1971; Lazarus, 1991; Turner and Stets, 2005) It could be argued that this is in part reflected

in the broad range of literature that has emerged including leadership skills (Lindebaum and Cartwright, 2011), educational attainment (Goleman, 1995), nursing (Cadman & Brewer, 2001) and social work (Morrison, 2007). If we consider the aforementioned neurological studies of Damasio (1994) and Le Doux (1993) regarding the impact of neurological damage and the specific impact on emotional regulation and cognition, whist IQ remains constant, we can further stake a claim for emotional intelligence representing a distinct construct.

Mathews *et al* (2002) suggest that emotional intelligence as a construct remains contested and unclear. Partly, this is due to the apparent overlaps with other existing constructs such a personality measurements and IQ. They suggest that because Goleman (1995) expands the concept to embrace factors such as *hope* and *impulse control* it threatens to create too diffuse a collection of ideas to be unified under one concept. For example, the reference to the connection between impulse control and emotional regulation has its roots in the work of Walter Mischel (see Shoda, Mischel and Peake 1990) and I would argue represents a rather casual link between Mischel's work around the ability to delay gratification in pre-school children and links to delinquency in teenage children. This is then mapped against Goleman's multifarious view of emotional intelligence. The core argument here is the ambiguous relationship between the elements contained within Goleman's view of emotional intelligence.

Reitti (2008) provides a cautionary view about the validity of the value base of emotional intelligence. Reitti suggests that attributes such as assertiveness, civic virtue and altruism as culturally biased constructs and the direct links to success suggested by Goleman (1995) are tenuous. Indeed, Reitti notes that these givens relating to emotional intelligence remain unchallenged or qualified and that this potentially could lead to a concept which celebrates and records specific attributes and in doing so overlooks individual and cultural diversity. This culturally driven aspect to emotional intelligence sets limitations and challenges for its application globally and more specifically within a social work context. This has clear echoes of the preceding discussion about the social constructed aspect of emotions and may be seen to be played out in the assumptions that Goleman may lay at the foundations of his claims. It could be argued that the ability based view of emotional intelligence proposed by Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (1999) reduces the emphasis on value laden attributes in that the focus is on representing emotional intelligence as a set of abilities that are not dependent on attained knowledge or acquired skills through training or education.

This less cohesive view of emotional intelligence has in some way been played out in the development of measurement tools. Bar-On (1997) developed the first commercially available test relating to emotional intelligence, namely the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i). This measure has much in common with existing personality measures (Mathews et al

2002) in that the focus on factors such as tolerance, empathy and self control are common across both. Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (1999) view emotional intelligence as a concept within the field of intelligence but with a focus on emotional and cognitive processes. They developed the Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS) which has much in common with existing IQ tests. These two examples of how researchers have taken differing routes towards a measure reflect the apparent lack of consensus regarding the concept of emotional intelligence. Mathews et al (2002) suggest that a key hurdle for emotional intelligence is that it is very difficult to ascertain what would be a correct and/or wrong answer or outcome. This is in part due to the subjective nature of assigning values to emotions. Furthermore, they explored the link between self report measures (i.e. MEIS) and outcomes and found the links were not robust. Goleman's multi faceted model is measured by a tool which involves a 360 degree assessment of the viewpoints of individuals associated with the person at the centre of the measurement. This attracts similar claims of subjectivity that I noted in relation to the personality model, and also brings into questions the motives and agendas of organisations involved in using such measurements. It is worth noting however, that such uncertainty about the subjective nature of emotions is a facet of the wider research around emotions considered in the previous section.

Mathews et al (2002) sum up the challenge facing emotional intelligence by suggesting that if emotional intelligence can't extricate itself from the

aforementioned overlaps with personality and intelligence processes, then it may only serve a "*cheerleading function that raises the flag for the importance of emotion in real life*"(ibid; p27).

It may be that the contextualised construct of emotional competence has something to offer at this point. Saarni (2000) identifies the concept of *emotional competence* which appears to have some elements in common with emotional intelligence. She provides the following definition: "*emotional competence is the demonstration of self-efficacy in emotion-eliciting social transactions*" (ibid p68). This construct shares the belief that individuals develop their internal self identities through experiences. The 'competency' element of this construct refers to the ability of an individual to be aware of the emotional states with themselves and others and be able to regulate their responses. A key element that sets emotional competence apart from emotional intelligence is that emotional competence refers to a *transaction* rather than a measurable ability. By this I mean, that the emphasis is on the interaction between an individual and the context in which they finds themselves in. This requires the individual to develop skills to respond to a range of environments rather than the focus being on a hierarchical set of abilities that exist regardless of context. This links well with the work of Hochschild (1983) who suggests that emotions may be driven by cultural rules and this requires adaptation in terms of how emotions may be felt and/or communicated from context to context.

I would conclude that the interpersonal aspects of emotional intelligence coupled with the inherently reflective nature of emotional awareness and management have a useful contribution to make when considering the role of emotions more broadly in social work practice. I will now establish the conceptual framework for emotions which will underpin this thesis.

2.9 – Emotions: conclusion and conceptual framework

In this chapter I have reviewed key elements from the literature pertaining to emotions. It has been evident that the topic of emotions has engendered interest and debate across centuries and more recently from a range of research perspectives. Despite differing emphases and angles of approach, current understandings of emotions are accepting of certain key facets (Barrett, 2012).

Turner and Stets (2005) from a sociological viewpoint include 5 key elements within their conceptual framework: biological, social context, labelling, expression and appraisal. Strongman (1987) from a psychological perspective finds space in his conceptual framework for the following elements: physiology, cognition, subjectivity, expression, consciousness and unconsciousness. Zapf (2002) noted from a social psychology perspective that emotions are: subjective, physiological and expressive. LeDoux (1997) from a cognitive neuroscience perspective noted physiology, neurology, cognition, appraisal, context, experience and expression as elements.

Kennedy-Moore and Watson (1999) when considering emotions from an expressive perspective noted the following: physiological arousal, subjective felt experience and expression.

In the context of social work and this thesis, there is much to draw upon from the aforementioned conceptual frameworks (not least the synergies between them) and the literature reviewed in this chapter. The following areas contribute to the underpinning conceptual framework of emotions in this thesis.

- *The contribution from neuroscience discussed in this chapter highlights the central role of the brain in terms of providing immediate responses and secondary processes of reasoning and cognition. These processes involve the appraisal of both physiological symptoms of arousal and an assessment of cues and context from experience.*
- *Emotions arise in response to significant events and stimuli. The meaning and significance that we attach to these events is crucial in determining both the felt and expressed emotion. These judgements are in part an internal process based on the conscious personal scripts and constructs, and unconscious memories and evolved responses. These responses are also influenced, channelled and constrained by wider social norms, cultures and expectations which impact on the perceived significance of events. The outcome of such judgements will determine subsequent actions and behaviors.*

- *Emotions also have an expressive aspect. They are an inter and intra personal phenomena that are expressed and displayed between people. Such expressions of emotions also sit within a wider context of influences which can, to an extent, determine what is perceived to be appropriate, purposeful and expected. Within this, there may be a divergence from internally experienced emotions and those which are expressed. This socially constructed viewpoint is tempered by an acceptance that emotions, both unconscious and conscious, are inherently individual phenomena and are characterised by subjectivities and meanings within the private world of an individual.*
- *In the context of this thesis, the preceding cornerstones of the conceptual framework will also be considered in relation to the construct of emotional intelligence. This will allow emotions to be linked with greater clarity to the awareness, management, attunement and empathic aspects of the social work role. It will act as a means of locating emotions within a pro-active relationship-based paradigm, yet with recognition of the wider professional context in which social workers operate.*

This conceptual framework represents a theoretical and definitional underpinning for this thesis. It will be referred to as 'the conceptual framework' throughout the thesis and elements of it will be used to clarify and explain themes as they arise.

Chapter 3 - Literature Review –Emotions and social work

3.1 – Emotions: service user perspectives and social work

This chapter will locate the preceding examination of the concept of emotions within the wider social work landscape. The role of emotions will be considered within the context of relationships with service users, supervision, decision making, reflective practice and practice skills. The chapter will conclude with a statement of the core research questions at the heart of this thesis.

A key aspect of social work is the centrality of the relationship and interaction between the worker and the service user (Lishman, 1994; Ward, 2010; Hennessey, 2011). Social work practice is often placed within a context of heightened emotion due to a range of circumstances (Howe, 2009). For example, the experience of bereavement can give rise to feelings of sadness, anger and uncertainty associated with the loss (Currer, 2007). The social work relationship therefore is concerned with the identification and response to the feelings that the presenting difficulty gives rise to. Howe (2009:1) suggests that "emotions define the social work relationship". The role of emotions is a two-way process in that social workers need to engage with the emotional context of the service user whilst also recognising the impact this

may have on themselves and in turn their practice. This links with notion of *sentimental work* proposed by Zapf (2002) which notes the two way nature of emotional expression and how this can create a dynamic that promotes engagement.

This has recently been echoed and highlighted in the *Munro Review of Child Protection* (Munro, 2011) which noted that the relationship between worker and service user was an essential element of 'how' information is gathered and that to do this effectively the worker must be able to identify their own emotional responses to the situation and be able to support the focus of the service user's attention towards the emotional aspects of their situation. The contention being that these elements of practice exist and should be acknowledged and harnessed in conjunction with the focus on procedures and evidence based practice. This directly builds on the work of Morrison (2007) who highlighted the apparent marginalisation of the social work relationship in the face of proceduralist developments and the role that emotional intelligence potentially could have in reclaiming the core skills and processes within the service user/worker relationship. If we consider the importance of the work of Munro (2011) in terms of contributing significantly to the national narratives about the direction of social work practice, then it can also be placed within the context of the work on emotional expression by Hochschild (1983). It could be argued that social workers are being provided with professional messages about the place of emotions within their practice,

and in turn this may contribute to the ways in which emotions are expressed and presented within the practice of social workers.

The suggestion that the recognition of the emotional context of social work practice is important may seem rather obvious, but it is not without its complications. Social work continues to grapple with what its role and function should be (Munro, 2011; Department of Education, 2010; Scottish Executive, 2006; Parton, 1997) and it remains a complex and contested issue. There are many elements to this debate but one of the key tensions is between the therapeutic aspects of the worker/service user relationship and procedural nature of statutory functions. By definition, any examination of statutory function will be dependant on the nature and context of the service user group. For example, under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 a social worker may be required to intervene when a child is failing to attend school regularly. The statutory function is to undertake an assessment and recommend an intervention that will remedy this difficulty. The underlying therapeutic aspects of this however require a worker to establish positive communication with the child and its parents/carers to explore the issues that may be contributing to the difficulties. Both aspects of the role are necessary to achieve a positive outcome, however the statutory function is the one with the most explicit profile and accountability.

The centrality of the social work relationship is reflected in the rapidly emerging literature concerned with service user involvement and perspectives. The last twenty years have seen the concept of service user involvement in decision making with regard to the services they receive become a core tenet of practice. There has been a raft of policy initiatives and legislation that have provided a framework and a legal mandate for service user participation. For example, the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996 makes provision for service users to be able to purchase, select and manage the services they require. Beresford (1994) highlights the emergence of concepts such as normalisation and sociological perspectives on disability as being at the root of the enhancement of involvement. Warren (2007:33) provides a useful commentary on the emergence of service user participation and highlights the following factors as key:

- Emergence of civil and welfare rights movements.
- Public dissatisfaction with lack of accountability of service provision
- Emergence of self help groups and organisations
- Development of collaborative ways of working
- Rise of consumerist approaches to welfare provision
- Influence of international service user and survivor movements
- Poverty and social exclusion

Warren (2007:33)

The above list provides a brief overview of the key factors involved in the emergence of service user involvement. Running alongside these developments has been greater emphasis on, and indeed opportunities for, service users to articulate what qualities and roles they would want social workers to possess and deliver. The Changing Lives Report (Scottish Executive, 2006) highlights the relationship between the therapeutic aspects of the social work relationship and the achievement of a personalised approach to practice which seeks to maximise service user involvement and control over the service they receive. The following table pulls together some key themes that have emerged regarding the qualities and skills service users felt are central to positive social work practice. These are set against the key elements of emotional intelligence as a means of beginning to establish the connections and relevancy of the concept in relation to social work practice. To further locate and cement the aforementioned links, the 3rd column in the table lays out the core values delineated in the GSCC Codes of Practice.

What service users want from social workers	Key elements of Emotional Intelligence	Core values for social work practice
• To 'hear' and value their perspectives and views. • To allow service users to define problems and goals – leading to a mutual understanding. • Social workers should adopt a 'friendly' approach -warmth, empathy and genuineness. • Involvement should be purposeful and supportive. • Social workers should demonstrate respect, honesty and reliability. • To be good listeners. • To value the uniqueness rather than overlay theoretical explanations. Mayer and Timms (1970) Rees and Wallace (1982) Harding and Beresford (1995) McNeil, Batchelor, Burnett and Knox (2005)	• Self awareness – leads to confident therapeutic responses and in turn decision making. • Managing emotions – regulate one's emotions in order offer appropriate support and to 'hear' emotional cues from others. • Motivation – liked to ability to focus attention on salient issues. • Empathy – understand another person's emotions, thoughts and perspectives. Recognise explicit and subtle emotional signals. • Relationships – the quality of relationship build flows form the 4 key elements above. Salovey and Mayer (1990)	• Protect the rights and promote the interests of service users and carers • Strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers. • Respect the rights of service users whilst seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or others. • Uphold public confidence in social care services • Be accountable for the quality of their work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving knowledge and skills GSCC (2010)

Table 1 - Emotional Intelligence and service user perspectives

The above table illustrates the relationship between the key facets of positive social work practice (from a service user perspective), the core values of the profession and the key elements of emotional intelligence. The core values noted in the table are very familiar and have broad applicability across all aspects of social work, and reaffirm the centrality of the quality of the relationship between worker and service user. Indeed, I would argue that all

five value areas require the worker to meaningfully and genuinely engage with service users to be achieved. For example, a social worker would need to be able to hear, understand and manage the perspectives and emotions of a service user in order to be in a position to be able to 'establish and maintain trust'. If we consider the work of Bolton and Boyd (2003) in this context then we can see space for a reduction in the dissonance between professional culture and individual emotions. This is crucial when considering the place of emotions in social work. Smith and Lorentzon's (2005) study of emotions within the professional culture of nursing is instructive here also as it notes that core codes of practice are often cited by workers as being key motivators to become involved in the profession in the first instance. This further underlines the potential congruency between emotional expression and the professional role.

The implicit reflective and analytical aspects of emotional intelligence have a significant contribution to make towards the quality and accountability of practice. Service users put great emphasis on their views being heard, but also they recognise that this flows from the development of a positive relationship with a social worker. It would appear that at the heart of this is the ability of a worker to 'hear' a service user's story and to engage in dynamic and therapeutic interactions. The concept of empathy is not new in social work literature and is cited as a core element of communication skills (Trevithick, 2005). Direct links should be made between the empathetic elements of emotional intelligence and the ability of workers to recognise the

explicit and implicit emotional and verbal narratives of the service user. The ability to recognise one's own response to the content or context of dialogue within the social work relationship will allow workers to present in a warm and respectful manner, but also to grasp the uniqueness of a service user's situation and perspective. It is a powerful argument for considering the role of emotional intelligence when one considers that the above table is based on what the users of social work services want from social workers.

Cadman and Brewer (2001) identify empathy as the key element of emotional intelligence that nurses should incorporate into their practice and make links between empathetic practice and positive outcomes for patients. Rosenberg (1990) notes the need for self-knowledge and reflexivity to underpin the emotional attunement into another's world and to make sense of this in the context of our own emotional experiences and scripts. England (1986:17) makes the links to social work clear when he states that *"the social worker always has to know not only about the circumstances of the client's world but also the client's interpretation of that world; it is this condition that makes social work".* The emphasis on the relationship between the social worker and service user as being of central importance is inescapable. The Changing Lives report (Scottish Executive, 2006) considers the role of the social worker, and illustrates this through the following diagram:

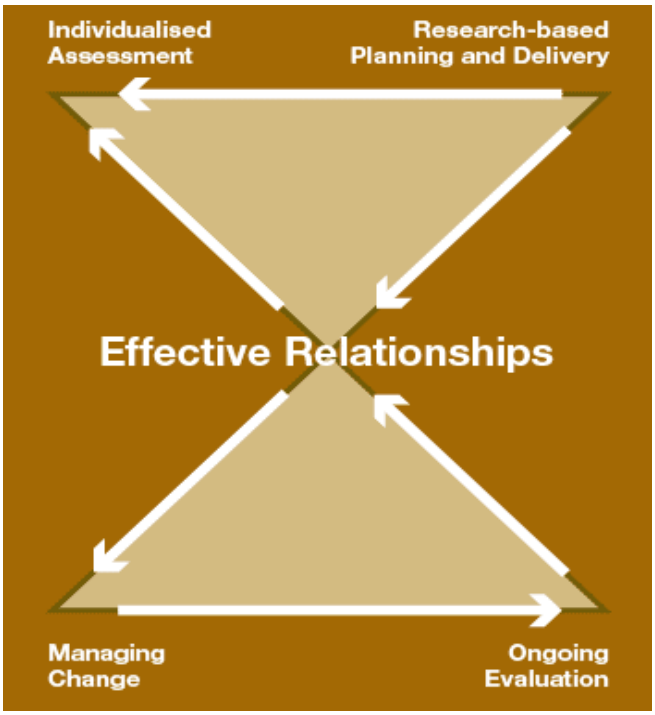

Diagram 1 – Effective relationships (McNeill et al 2005)

The above diagram relates to research concerned with Criminal Justice social work, but the messages are transferable across all contexts. The centrality of the relationship is clear, as are the links to all other associated activities and outcomes. The Changing Lives report goes further to acknowledge that in their studies of the views of social workers, it was this core therapeutic relationship which felt most under threat.

Morrison (2008) examined the relationship that emotional intelligence had on self-reported preferred approaches to dealing with conflict within the nursing profession. The study found that those respondents who had scored highly on an emotional intelligence test tended to engage in collaborative approaches to conflict resolution. This refers to collaboration with patients to

seek an understanding of their views and perspectives. This provides a useful signpost for social work in that the centrality of interpersonal relationships is shared with nursing and the desirability of collaborative (or partnership) styled approaches are central to the aforementioned vision of 21st century social work.

3.2 - Emotions and decision making - an uneasy alliance?

The role of emotions and the impact that they may have on practice is a contentious one. The relationship between rational thought and emotions is often depicted as an uneasy alliance. Popular aphorisms such "don't let your heart rule your head" can be traced back to the work of Plato (Forgas, 2001) and Howe (2009) suggests that emotions have been viewed as wayward and crude by western philosophers such as Kant and Descartes and that the clarity of rational thought is compromised by their existence. This view was countered by enlightenment philosophers such as David Hume who stated that emotions and reason should work in harmony. Mayer, Salovey & Caruso (2000) suggest that emergent themes of social justice, anti war movements and equality from the 1960s onwards reflect a challenge to the aforementioned paradigm. They go on to suggest that the humanist movement within psychology began to reflect this. For example Maslow (1943) emphasised the importance of individuals feeling satisfied and that consideration of emotions was central to this.

The conceptual framework proposed in the preceding chapter was drawn from a range of perspectives, but what was common to all, was the place of cognition and appraisal (Darwin, 1890; Rosenberg, 1990; Lazarus, 1991;Damasio, 2000). When we consider the judgements and meanings we attach to our emotional responses whether driven by social context, survival instinct or previous emotional experiences, it is clear that emotions are intrinsically linked to thought. Without such thought, then emotions would simply be reduced to free floating physiological sensations. Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1996) note the role of meta-cognition in relation to emotions and the 'working models' we develop in order to make sense of events and stimuli. Simply put, the research surveyed within this literature review refutes the notion that emotions are separate from thought and reflection. The conceptual framework at the heart of this thesis views them as inextricably linked parts of the same process.

It is useful to consider what we mean by rationality in order to clarify where emotions may sit in relation to it. Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) suggest that the common view of rationality is concerned with maximising chances of success and minimising chances of loss and the focus is on logic and factual evidence. This would appear to overlook other factors such as kindness, justice, equality and fairness. They suggest that this then leads to the potential for considerable disagreement about what the rationally 'right' thing to do would be from one individual to the next. This they suggest opens the

door for needing to explore *why* people make the decisions they do. They propose a model called "*the implacable logic of emotions*" (ibid; p214) which takes steps towards meshing rationality and emotions together. The following diagram is based on this model and is intended to illustrate a cyclical process which links well with the concept of emotional intelligence and in turn has a resonance for social work practice.

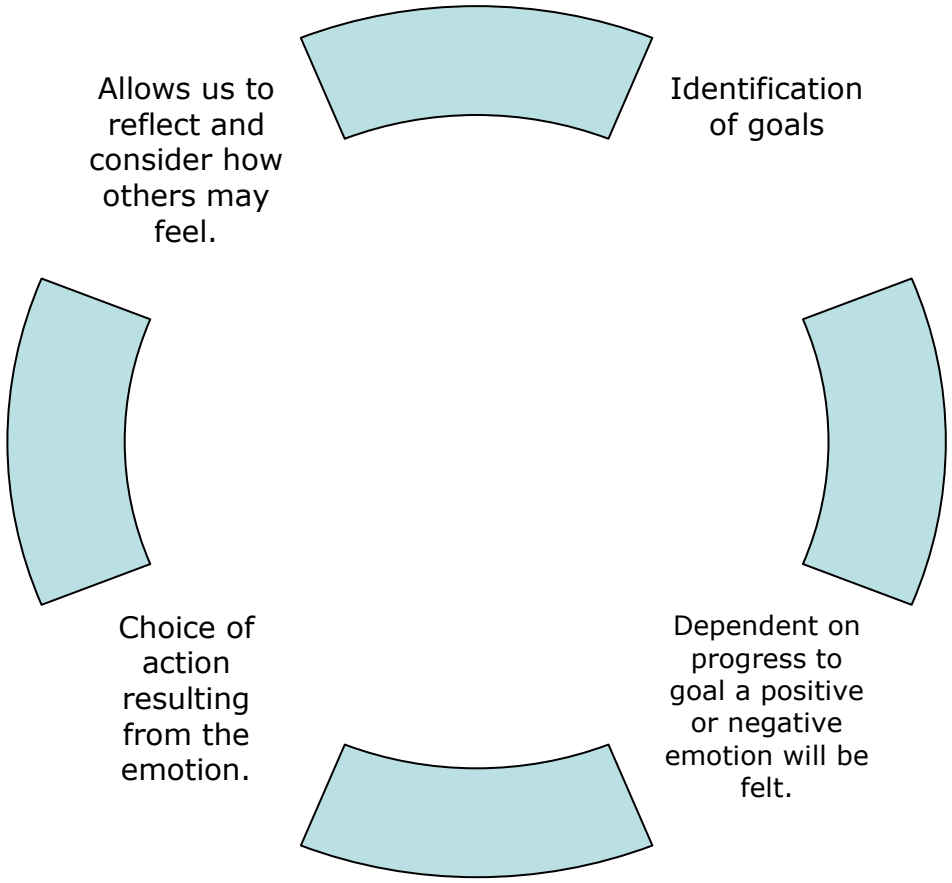

Diagram 2 - The Implacable Logic of Emotions – based on Lazarus and Lazarus (1994)

The above diagram is intended to illustrate that there is a relationship between an event, the associated emotions and the processes of decision-making that ensue. A key element is that if we accept the aforementioned definition of rationalism, then the choices made through examination of the emotional response will be by definition rational. By this I mean that they will be goal orientated and bespoke to our individual wants and beliefs. Another important element here is that if an individual undertakes this process, their ability to understand and reflect upon emotional cues and processes will help them interpret how others may feel. It is clear that this model sits comfortably within the concept of emotional intelligence in terms of the notion of choice, regulation and empathy. It is important however, to consider the unconscious aspects of emotions and Clore and Orton's (2000) 'top-down' model which suggested that at times we respond to events through drawing upon unconscious memories and experiences. This reminds us that as individuals we are not always consciously appraising situations and/or our responses to them, and as such the need for reflection is crucial.

This view that emotions and thought are compatible and intrinsically linked is developed further within the context of social work practice by Morrison (2007). Morrison notes that our emotions result from an appraisal of a situation in practice. Hence the creation of an emotional response is in itself a process of *thought*. This is echoed by Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) who suggest that if emotions arise from our own personal meanings and identity, then emotions can't exist without thought. They emphasise that the

emotions give rise to choices about actions. These choices may at times appear to be unreasonable or ill-advised, but are the product of a cognitive process. Goleman (1995) concurs with this view and suggests that if an individual lacks emotional intelligence they will find it harder to assign values to the choices they are presented with, and in turn will find decision making more difficult. In a sense, this is the polar opposite to the familiar paradigm that emotions cloud thought. Simply put, the presence and use of emotion *clarifies* rather than clouds judgement. If we accept that there is a role whether positive or at least unavoidable for emotions in decision making, then we can begin to develop a view that the construct of emotional intelligence has a resonance in practice. The aforementioned review of what service users value in the practice of social workers, for example warmth and empathy, would suggest that the integration of emotional elements of a social worker's decision making in practice are not seen as a negative process.

The notion that emotions and thought process are compatible and have a function is not confined to literature regarding emotions and emotional intelligence. The concept of social competence has much in common with emotional intelligence (Topping, Bremner & Holmes, 2000). They describe social competence as being "*the ability to integrate thinking, feeling and behaviour to achieve social tasks and outcomes valued in the host context and culture"* (ibid; p32). This concept has much greater emphasis on the influence of collective and cultural factors which determine how an individual

behaves. This sits comfortably within the conceptual framework of this thesis in that emotional appraisal and expression are influenced and constrained by social norms, cultures and expectations (Turner and Stets, 2005). The key element in common with emotional intelligence would appear to be that there is a thought process involved that recognises the role of feelings and that this serves a function. Averill (1994) pushes this idea further by suggesting that if we accept that emotions have a function, then to suppress or sideline emotions is *dysfunctional.* Hennessey (2011) concurs with this view by emphasising that to have an emotional response to any given situation does not preclude an *informed* response. He goes on to rank emotions as a valid partner alongside theory and skill and notes that there is an interaction between these elements. England (1986) suggests that the selection of which theoretical models to apply and/or prioritise are affected by the emotional response to both the presenting situation and the knowledge base itself. Turner and Stets (2005) note the link between emotions and motivation and the impact our appraisals of situations have on the intensity and direction of our actions. Meyers (2008) echoes this view when he acknowledges the attractiveness of seeking a 'diagnosis' in social work and the role that emotions and values may play in the choices we make in this process. Ergur (2009) considers emotional intelligence within an educative environment, and suggests that educators who do not use their emotional intelligence (expressing empathy and genuineness) when teaching do not communicate their knowledge base effectively. This highlights the relationship between emotional intelligence and a knowledge base, and is a

helpful signpost for social work to consider emotional intelligence as a way of *communicating* evidence based decisions as well as arriving at the decisions themselves.

3.2 – Emotions, emotional intelligence and practice skills

The importance of the methods and skills deployed by social workers to establish positive working relationships with service users is a core element of social work programmes and ongoing professional training. Lishman (1994) proposes the following core conditions of positive relationship building:

- Genuineness
- Warmth
- Acceptance
- Encouragement and approval
- Empathy
- Responsiveness and sensitivity

(Lishman, 1994:45)

These conditions clearly chime with the views expressed by service users, and in turn it could be contended allow for similar links to be made to emotional intelligence and emotional expression. A key outcome anticipated from integrating the above elements into social work practice, is the creation of a safe and open therapeutic dialogue. In many ways, successful relationship building sets a safe backdrop for emotions and feelings to be aired and explored between workers and service users. I use the word

'between' purposefully, as this is unavoidably and unashamedly a two way process. The concept of 'genuineness' requires a worker to 'be themselves' and share information and feelings about themselves (Rogers, 1980). There can be a tension between the expression of emotions and felt emotions when viewed through the lens of organisational culture (Hochschild, 1983; Bolton and Boyd, 2003). For example, the professional role may require the social worker to form a positive trusting relationship with a service user but this maybe compromised by feelings of fear and distrust. This then places the worker in a situation where 'genuineness' may not sit comfortably with the organisationally required emotional expression.

Morrison (2007) provided a lucid connection between emotional intelligence and the defence against the erosion of the place that relationships have within practice. He noted that the success of assessment and intervention processes relied on an awareness and management of emotions at all stages in casework practice. This links comfortably with the notion that emotional intelligence requires a degree of self-knowledge and in turn 'attunement' with service users (Goleman, 1985). Attunement refers to the ability to respond to actions and feelings which requires a worker not only to *know* that they understand the emotional context of an interaction, but be able to *transmit* this within the relationship. This chimes with the work of Howe (1993:13) and the notion of "*therapeutic sequence*" within psychotherapeutic counselling relationship. This distilled views of service users into the following process: "*accept me, understand me and talk with me*". A central

tenet of this approach is the need for the worker to tune into the narrative of the service user and that this is underpinned by skills of engagement and the ability to articulate and communicate an understanding and acceptance of the service user's situation.

It seems that emotionally attuned practice could potentially create a *self-fulfilling prophecy,* in the sense that the successful use of Lishman's conditions creates an environment which generates an emotional content to interactions which then further calls upon the worker to demonstrate emotionally intelligent practice. It may be useful to construct a visual model which illustrates the circular nature of these processes.

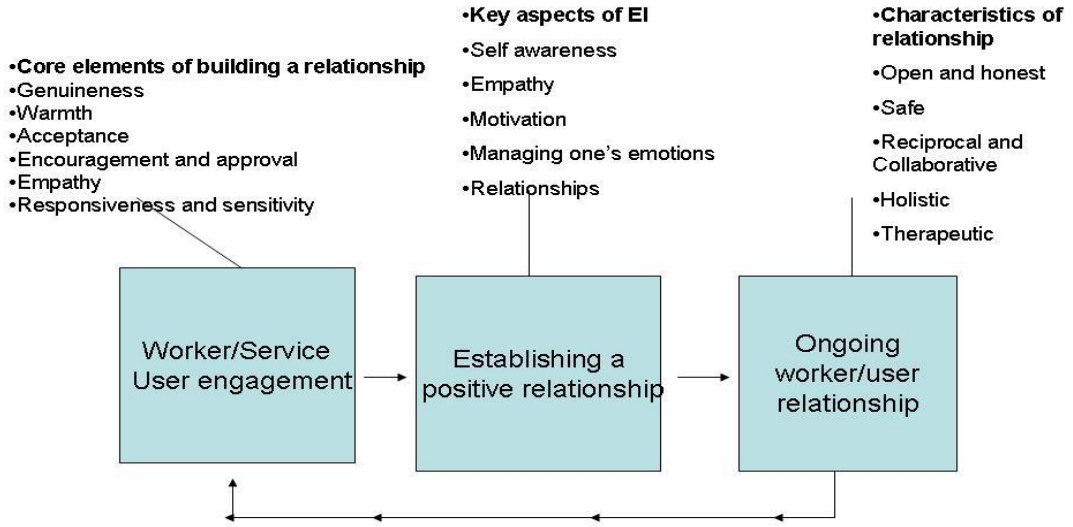

Diagram 3 – Emotional intelligence and relationship skills

The above diagram is intended to illustrate how positive communication skills at the point of engagement with a service user not only require elements of emotional intelligence to execute, but generates a relationship whose nature allows for an emotional content which requires further use of emotional intelligence. In the first block, the worker and service user will meet for the first time. This stage in a social work relationship is characterised by clarification of the presenting issues and clarification of the potential role of the worker. The 6 core elements of relationship building noted in connection with this stage are required to make the aforementioned functional aspects of the interaction empowering, respectful and supportive. In the second block it is noted that a positively created relationship will require the worker (and indeed the service user) to utilise their emotional intelligence to generate, manage and respond to the issues that the relationship will give rise to. This then feeds into an ongoing relationship (3rd block) which may be characterised by a range of positive characteristics. The ongoing and evolutionary nature of the social work relationship requires this model to be viewed in cyclical terms to ensure the maintenance of a positive relationship. It is important however to consider this positive model in the wider professional and personal context of both parties. In terms of the social worker, their emotional reactions and professional role may be at odds with some of the elements noted above. This brings us back to the conceptual framework and the need for the emotional attunement, appraisal and presentation to be considered within a social context, and also for the unconscious elements of emotions to be recognised.

3.4 - Professionalism, proceduralism and accountability

The uneasy relationship between recognition of emotions and the pursuit of rational decision making is further played out when we consider the emergence of the professionalisation of social work. Social work has struggled to lay claim to a coherent vision of itself as a profession for a range of reasons. One issue is that the underpinning knowledge base of the profession is disparate (Dominelli, 2009) and draws from a range of sources such as psychology, sociology, moral philosophy and law. Munro (2011) highlights the need for social work to grapple with the organisational and individual contexts of social work to achieve a coherent and realistic vision of the profession. The notion of relationship based social work suggested by Hennessey (2011) is persuasive but is often pitted against more bureaucratic professional narratives rather than being seen to co-exist.

There is an existing tension with the notion of social work as a profession which has its roots in the radical social work movement. The radical social work movement emerged in the late 1960s and expressed a strong view that social work could not and should not seek to be viewed as a profession. This was due to the proposition that social work was a political activity and one which should focus on challenging the social structures and the system which impinge on service users (Bailey and Brake, 1976). The notion of professionalism was seen to reflect an elitist and paternalistic view of social work. An enduring outcome associated with radical social work was the

emergence of Anti-Discriminatory Practice and its synthesis with the psychosocial aspects of social work practice (Pease and Fook, 1999). One of the key aspects of this historical debate around professionalism is the constant presence of the relational nature of social work practice. A pragmatic and responsive view of the profession of social work emerges in the Changing Lives document (Scottish Executive, 2006) which incorporates the need for a robust knowledge base, clear professional value base and an emphasis on partnership and collaboration with service users and wider multi-disciplinary colleagues. With the registration of social workers and the associated responsibilities and accountabilities the issue of professionalism has never been more cogent.

Meyers (2008) notes that a 'non-emotional' approach to social work could be viewed to sit comfortably with the notion that social workers should be non-judgemental in their interactions and assessments of service users. Meyers counters this view by questioning whether pure non-judgmentalism is achievable, and whether the best way to approach it is to allow for an awareness and acknowledgement of emotions and values in order to reach a non-judgemental outcome. For example, if a worker is to become involved in working with a service user who is aggressive and uncooperative, it is important that the emotional responses of the worker are considered and explored so that a non-judgemental approach to the work can be achieved. To avoid such a process may well lead to an illusion of non-judgmentalism but runs the risk of producing uncritical and repressed practice. This was

echoed by the NSPCC (2008) with their suggestion that social workers often feel that their role is to focus on the strengths of service users and carers and to adopt an optimistic approach to their practice. They go on to argue that this approach appears to avoid significant reflection and analysis and may be a barrier to required action in child protection cases.

Mattison (2000) states that there is an increasing emphasis on social workers to 'act correctly'. This inevitably leads workers to seek reliable and legitimate procedures and guidance to ensure their practice is 'correct'. Mattison notes that this approach overlooks another associated aspect of defensible decision making which is that workers must be able to understand and articulate the process of decision making as well as the actual decision itself. Munro (2011) and Howarth (2007) both warn against relying on a proceduralist approach to practice. The argument being that no matter how thorough procedures are, they are ultimately liable to the subjective choices and decisions of a worker. This brings us back to one of the key facets of the conceptual framework for emotions in that the presentation of emotions and the associated decisions and actions are in part driven by professional culture (Hochschild, 1983). The preceding point about 'acting correctly' illustrates the significant impact that external cues and influences can have on how social workers wish to be *seen*, regardless of the emotional labour entailed in certain situations where dissonance exists. It also ties in with the notion of social consensus suggested by Rosenberg (1990) and the influence of being seen to act in accordance with others.

Howarth (2007) discusses the limitations of holistic assessment models which are intended to give workers a clear framework to ensure decisions are well founded. It may be useful at this point to illustrate this issue in relation to the 'my world triangle' contained within *Getting* in Right for Every Child (Scottish Government (2009).

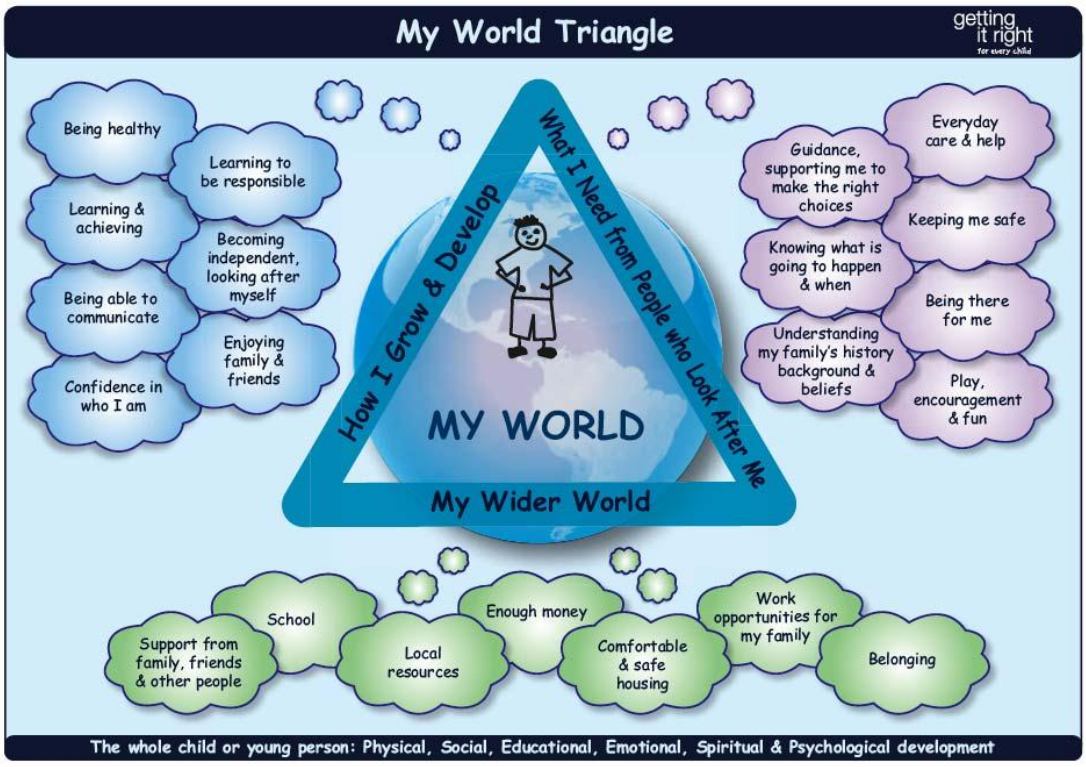

Diagram 4– My World Triangle - Scottish Government (2009)

The above diagram is a key model for social work practitioners in Scotland to use in their practice when making assessments about the needs of young people and their families. Howarth (2007) suggests that such tools do not encourage or provide signposts for practitioners to consider their own role in

the choices and priorities that they make in relation such tools. Howarth calls for a reclaiming of the 'professional domain' within procedures. It might be useful to describe this as the *interpretative gap* between procedures and their actual use in practice. It is within this gap that workers bring their values, emotions, experience, knowledge and context to bear on their decision making. This is similar to the personal emotional domain highlighted by Bolton and Boyd (2003) regardless of the strength of organisational influence. Holland (1999) found that many workers preferred to present themselves as neutral observers who could use quantifiable 'scientific' measurements to explain their decision making in practice. If we accept that emotions and values impact on our decision-making and that genuinely holistic practice (as inferred by the above triangle) involves a 'head, hands and heart' approach (Petrie et al, 2009) then the need for emotional awareness and intelligence would seem to be a logical aspect of this. Mattison (2000:207) provides a persuasive argument for this when she states that *"there is general agreement in the literature that the ultimate decision for resolving an ethical dilemma lies in the circumstances and the value system or preferences of the decision maker"*.

The aforementioned vision of social work has been compromised by an emphasis on proceduralist approaches to practice (Payne, 2000). Payne warns that the bureaucratisation of social work undermines the desirability of social workers exercising the professional confidence and competence to practice in an autonomous and accountable manner. Instead, he suggests

that procedures can give rise to dogmatic and unresponsive practice. Ferguson (2005) in his powerful examination of the Victoria Climbie case pushes this argument further by noting that the emotional content of the case was diminished and ignored by the workers involved due in part to procedures not requiring them to do so. It is at this point that it could be argued that the place of emotional intelligence in contemporary social work needs most urgently to be harnessed and utilised. Ferguson (2005) reports that key findings from the inquiry following the tragedy concluded that lack of leadership and poor communication between professionals involved were the key issues involved. The question posed by Ferguson is why apparently straight forward actions were not undertaken by the workers involved. The answer may well lie partly in issues of leadership and communication, and the review of systems and procedures may well be part of the solution. Ferguson suggests that a key element that has been overlooked is the emotional responses of the workers in the face of extremely difficult situations within the context of overwhelming workloads. These issues are very pertinent when one considers the messages in the Munro Report (Munro 2011) relating to professional autonomy and highlights the need for an infrastructure that facilitates and support social workers to achieve this. This appears to be a strong example when one considers Rosenberg's (1990) emphasis on the reflexive aspect of emotions. This would appear to have been unavailable to workers which in turn may have encouraged the suppression of difficult emotions and in turn prompted ambiguous and ill-defined actions as a consequence.

Mathews et al (2002) suggest that emotional incompetence within a work setting can lead to workers seeking the 'proper' way to respond when they are unsure. This they argue, leads to avoiding engaging with one's feelings, and in turn may discount or ignore our negative feelings in order to maintain a perceived correct response. Barlow and Hall (2007) reported that social work students felt anxious when there was a disparity between their 'public action' and their internal feelings. This could reasonably be applied to qualified practitioners and again suggests that workers would benefit from a forum to explore these issues. This clearly has links to the above example and suggests that social workers may need a forum to consider emotional responses. It is heartening that these themes have been taken a step further forward by *Social Work Task Force* (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2009) with the acknowledgement that support systems and leadership need to evolve to allow for the emotional elements of practice to be managed. The role that supervision may play in this process will be discussed in the next section.

Goleman (1996) makes the link between emotional intelligence and the ability to manage one's emotions. This could be mapped against the experiences of workers in the Victoria Climbie case. The pressure of workloads and lack of leadership, coupled with an alarming and potentially dangerous practice context would require the workers to manage and respond to a range of internal and external emotional issues. If we accept

the reductionist nature of procedurally driven practice, then it is likely that workers would struggle to find a safe and valid forum to consider the emotional context of their work. Cohen (2001) suggests that the complexity and apparent hopelessness of some social work practice contexts may lead to *"an active looking away, a sense of a situation so utterly hopeless and incomprehensible that we cannot bear to think about it".* This paints an uncomfortable picture of the possible reality of social work practice. It is one in which the emotional intelligence of social workers is under extreme pressure and/or one in which there is not a place to either express it or act upon it adequately. If we accept that there is a strong emphasis on partnership working with service users (Scottish Executive, 2006) then it could be argued that this places a further pressure on workers *not* to acknowledge the challenges of engagement with complex and reluctant service users. This brings us back to the heart of the social work relationship which can be challenging and threatening as well as empowering and collaborative. Both examples of a practice relationship require the use of emotional intelligence to support the social work intervention and to allow the worker to acknowledge, understand and manage the emotional content of their work.

It may be useful here to draw parallels with the notion of *impression management* proposed by Goffman (1972). Goffman suggests that individuals actively present an image of themselves that meets the perceived criteria in any given situation. These actions can be positive and be

concerned with ingratiation, but can also be defensive and require control and selectivity in one's actions. I would argue that social workers need to exercise impression management in a range of contexts whether it is within direct interactions with service users, or within their communications in relation to the organisations and structures that govern their work. This discussion forms the basis of a much wider debate (beyond but including the issue of emotions) about the meaning of the term 'being professional' and its meaning within the context of social work.

3.5 - Reflective practitioners

Salovey and Mayer (1990) highlight self-awareness, empathy and the ability to understand one's own feelings and those of others as key elements of emotional intelligence. It is useful to map these aspects of emotional intelligence (and the processes that underpin them) with the concept of reflection and reflexivity. In the very simplest terms, reflection is the activity of 'thinking'. The action of reflection allows workers to consider a range of factors that contribute to a situation or decision that they are involved within their practice. A similarly simplified positive outcome of reflection is that it avoids social work practice becoming 'routinised' (Thompson, 2005) where the complexity and individuality of each case is overlooked. We can then develop the idea of reflection to encompass the activity of looking back at what we *did,* and *saw*, and *felt* and *knew* about a situation.

This links well to the appraisal and reflexive elements of emotions (Rosenberg, 1990; Turner and Stets, 2005) which emphasises that once an emotional response has been identified it is then given *meaning* through a process of thought and reflection which draws upon previous experiences, norms and social context. Given the complexity of the social work task, coupled with the centrality of relationships, it is clear that opportunities to reflect upon the emotional content of practice should be given an explicit status. This clearly links well with the cognition and appraisal elements of the conceptual framework discussed previously. Davis and Franzoi (1996) discuss the notion of private self-consciousness (PSC) which refers to the activity of reflexively exploring one's emotions to seek clearer understandings of responses, motivations and actions. They suggest that the propensity to undertake this varies from person to person and if pursued without a structure (i.e. without supervision in the context of social work) can lead to a dwelling upon negative emotions such as fear and in turn increase the likelihood of stress.

In his seminal text *The Reflective Practitioner,* Schon (1983) sought to challenge the concept of technical rationality. This is the notion that practice can be driven purely by the application of knowledge and theory. Schon proposed two powerful aspects of practice which he termed as the 'high ground' and 'swampy lowlands'. The former refers to the knowledge base which gives workers a framework with which to comprehend and act within a given situation. The latter refers to the less clear and unpredictable

complexities of any given situation or relationship which can not be fully understood from a rigid knowledge base. These ideas were further developed by Fook and Gardner (2007) who noted that critical reflection allows workers to take a step back from the aforementioned swamps and cast a light on both formal and informal aspects of the knowledge that they bring to bear on a situation. The 'informal' aspects of this include the examination of the origins and content of assumptions and responses in relation to practice. Schon also draws a distinction between reflection *in* action and reflection *on* action. The first concept refers to the ability to think about the situation whilst one is engaged with it, and the latter refers to thinking about the situation at a later point in time. This brief introduction to the work of Schon provides a platform for drawing some useful parallels with emotional intelligence.

'Expert' Practitioner Model I	**'Reflective' Practitioner Model II**	**'Emotionally Intelligent' Practitioner Model III**
I am presumed to know and must do so regardless of my own uncertainty.	I am presumed to know, but I am not the only one with the relevant knowledge. My uncertainty may be a source of learning for me and for others.	I am presumed to know, but I am able to acknowledge how uncertainty makes me feel. This in turn allows me to regulate my responses and be able to pick up on emotional cues from the client.
Keep my distance from the client; hold on to expert role. Give the client a sense of my expertise, but convey a feeling of warmth and sympathy as a 'sweetener'.	Seek out connections with client's thoughts and feelings. Allow the client to develop respect from my knowledge from its evidence in our working relationship.	Seek out connections with clients' thoughts and feelings and understand what these are and how they could be used within the relationship. Work towards an open, honest and collaborative relationship.
Look for deference and status in the client's response to my professional persona.	Look for sense of freedom and of a real connection with client. A professional 'façade' is no longer a necessity.	Look for a relationship which allows for emotions to be recognised and explored. This will create a professional identity which is not a 'façade' but one based on empathy and genuineness.

Table 2 - Adapted from Model I/II Practitioner Perspectives – Schon (1983:300)

The table above is adapted from the work of Schon (1983), and extends the concept of the reflective practitioner to embrace the concept of emotional intelligence. There are clear parallels between the two concepts. In particular, the concept of reflection would seem to be at the heart of the ability to be self aware, and in turn be able to apply this awareness in practice. It could be argued that the emotionally intelligent social worker is one who can be a reflective practitioner, but can apply the fruits of the reflection explicitly within the social work relationship. Howe (2009: 181) concurs with this view by stating that "relationships *can only be conducted*

with skill and compassion if the social worker is emotionally intelligent." Ruch (2001) discusses the notion of holistic reflection which encompasses the following:

- *Technical reflection* – reflecting on 'what' was done and 'what' could be changed.
- *Practical reflection* – reflects on wider aspects such as wisdom, experience and self awareness – leading to not just a question of 'what' but also 'why'.

These two aspects of reflection contribute to the broader notion of *critical reflection* which seeks to examine assumptions and presumed 'givens' (Fook & Gardner, 2007). Fook and Gardner make explicit reference to the emotional aspects of critical reflection and are clear that reflection can have a therapeutic aspect to it *and* should feed back into actions rather than being an internal retrospective process. Ferguson (2005) notes that it is this ability and opportunity for reflection that appears to have been missing in the practice of workers involved with the Victoria Climbie case. He argued that workers appeared to be constricted by proceduralist approaches to their practice. Fook and Gardner (2007:134) suggest a possible reason for this when they contend that "*it may be surprising that in the health and human service field, participants felt that there was an embargo on talking about emotions*". Morrison (2007:247) suggested from his anecdotal experience as an external examiner of social work programmes that students who achieved highest grades for their dissertations were the students who had achieved a

connection and *"congruence of professional, academic and personal mindfulness".* The suggestion being that effective reflection required emotional intelligence and an explicit application of it within academic reflection and writing. If we extend these practices to embrace emotional intelligence then it may be possible for social workers to transcend procedurally driven practice and move towards the collaborative and personalised services at the heart of contemporary visions of social work (Scottish Executive, 2006; Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2009).

Mills and Klienmann (1998) discuss the concept of *reflexivity* which acknowledges that emotions have a role to play in the construction of knowledge and how it is used. They recognise that emotions will play a part in determining the focus and choices made by individuals when considering their actions. They go on to argue that issues associated with power, context and role all play a part in how we construct and use our knowledge base. This takes the act of reflection a step further, in that social workers could be encouraged to consider not just their emotional responses within a given event, but also how their emotions impact on the knowledge that they bring to bear on a situation. D'Cruz et al (2006) explored social work practitioners' views of reflexivity as a concept in practice. It was noted that workers felt the process allowed them to step outside of procedurally driven approaches and to consider their views and responses to these procedures more clearly. One of the key outcomes suggested by Ruch (2002) is that the reflexive

practitioner is given the opportunity to locate themselves at the heart of their practice rather than 'standing back' from it and focussing on process.

The above discussion raises an important question. Where can a social worker engage in this reflective/reflexive process? The answer is at least in part likely to be 'within supervision'. In the seminal text on supervision by Kadushin (1976) it is suggested that supervision should be administrative, educative, supportive and restorative. The latter aspects suggest a potential role to explore the emotional content of practice. Wilson et al (2008) suggest that there has been a shift towards a case management approach to supervision that may well overlook a supportive and therapeutic role. Clore (1994) emphasises that an outward suppression of emotion is not an indicator of the absence of the emotion or the impact it may be having. Clore goes on to suggest that this leads to a lack of clarity about feelings and in turn potentially poor judgements. This provides a cautionary point in relation to the potential consequences for social workers who receive an administrative/management style of supervision. Pennebaker (1991) undertook a study that examined individuals who had experienced trauma. A key finding was that individuals who had not been given the opportunity to discuss their experiences and feelings found it very difficult to separate past experiences from current ones. This has an applicability for social work practice in that an emotionally intelligent social worker will be able to identify their responses to an event and be able to 'frame' their emotional response to it. This will in part rely on the role of supervision.

3.6 – Supervision and the exploration of emotions

The preceding discussion makes a strong argument for social workers engaging in a significant degree of reflection about their practice and that this process could and should encompass emotions and feelings. This is coupled with the case that has been made to incorporate emotional intelligence in social work practice and decision making. There are a range of forums where the emotional content of social work could be expressed. These include reports, assessments, contracts, interactions with service users and multi-disciplinary networks. The ability of workers to express the emotional content of their work in these forums will be dependent on workers feeling that it is valid and desirable to do so. A key support for social workers is the process of supervision. This provides workers with a forum to discuss their practice with another practitioner (usually a senior colleague) and explore the functional aspects of their practice but also potentially to critically reflect upon the content of the practice. Fook and Gardner (2007) make explicit reference to the emotional aspects of critical reflection and suggest that this can have a therapeutic aspect to it whilst also directly feeding into ongoing practice and decision making. The importance of supervision is noted by England (1986) who suggests that social workers must be engaged in deep analysis of their practice and be clear about their own perceptions and those of others. This clearly has links to emotional intelligence and locates it within the supervisory relationship.

The importance of the role that supervision may play in promoting safe and positive social work practice was a key recommendation by the NSPCC (2008) in their evidence submitted as part of Lord Laming's review of Child Protection. The central plank of the argument was that *"working with manipulative, violent, and possibly sadistic adults is emotionally draining not to mention frightening. To defend oneself it is common to put up protective emotional barriers"* (NSPCC 2008: 8). This was taken forward and echoed by the Social Work Task Force (Department of Children, Schools and Families 2009) with the emphasis on the need for improved supervision and training of supervisors. It was reported by the NSPCC (2008) that in the face of such challenging work that supervision was of a low quality. The 'quality' that was reported to be missing was the opportunity for workers to reflect upon their feelings and their practice. This was echoed in a study of decision making in child protection by Holland (1999) who found that social workers had an underdeveloped 'language' when it came to describing feelings and felt more comfortable when discussing their work in a technicist manner. It was argued that this was in part due to there being a lack of legitimacy in discussing practice in terms of feelings. Supervision could provide a vehicle for this perception to be addressed and in turn the development of a 'language' to support it. In relation to the conceptual framework, one can see the interplay between the organisational context of social work and how this may make the labelling and expression of felt emotions difficult. The two elements appear to go hand in hand and where there is dissonance and suppression, it is important to remember the ongoing emotional labour.

Hawkins and Shohet (2000:3) provide a useful description of the emotional element within a social work supervisory relationship;

"the supervisors role is not just to reassure the worker, but to allow the emotional disturbance to be felt within the safer setting of the supervisory relationship, where it can be survived, reflected and learned from"

They go on to note the importance of allowing social workers to stand back from their practice so that they do not internalise all their emotional responses. Fineman (1985) notes the relationship between lack of supervision and stress among workers. There is an acknowledgement that supervision operates within a wider context and there are other factors which may impact on the nature and focus of the supervisory relationship. Hawkins and Shohet (2000) recognise that there is a potential tension between management and educator roles that a supervisor may inhabit. They suggest that both partners in the supervisory relationship should construct a contract that acknowledges and clarifies the parameters of supervision. Hughes and Pengelly (1997) emphasise the need for clarity about confidentiality when constructing supervisory contracts. Hawkins and Shohet (2000) also note that the procedural focus that is evident in many social work supervisory relationships is often driven by resources and the need to cover the practical elements of a caseload. This also needs to be considered and included within the contract. Collins (2007) reinforces this point by noting that the 'emotional labour' of social work continues regardless of the emphasis on procedures. Collins goes on to note that positive emotions are

often overlooked in the literature around emotions in social work. This is an important point in that supervision should allow for the exploration of feelings such as joy and contentment with particular cases. This can act as an emotional buffer to cope with negative emotions as well as allowing for reflection on why positive emotions are being elicited.

Mattinson (1981) suggests that a supervisory relationship has three partners rather than two. Mattinson identifies the service user(s) as the third party and a potential threat to the worker being given space to explore issues pertinent to them. This has clear implications for the incorporation of reflection and emotion into supervision. They propose that the needs of the wider organisation and the service users are often closely aligned and/or related and can leave the worker's individual issues as a lower priority.

Cadman and Brewer (2001) considered the need for role models in nursing who demonstrate emotionally intelligent approaches to practice. This is a helpful contribution to considering potential roles for a social work supervisor where emotional intelligence (and emotions more broadly) could be modeled within the supervisory relationship and be promoted from a 'top down' perspective (from supervisor to worker) as well as a 'bottom up' perspective (the worker engaging in reflection within supervision). This was echoed by Cole et al (2006) who explored the impact of supervisory styles in industry and found that supervisors who actively explored emotions within supervision produced positive emotions in their workers and in turn heightened

performance. Tsang (2006) suggests that a social work educator (supervisor) should swing between an emphasis on cognition and emotion to allow social workers to consider the often contradictory demands on them. For example, the tension between potential controlling aspects of the social work role and therapeutic roles requires consideration of the emotional impact of this tension not just a cognitive awareness of it. Tsang talks vividly about the need for supervision to have a nourishing and replenishing function. This links helpfully with the aforementioned emphasis that Collins (2007) gives to exploration of the positive aspects of practice.

Barlow and Hall (2007) studied the views of social work students on practice learning placements. They found that students reported feeling under stress when their individual emotional experiences in practice were incongruent with what they perceived to be the required 'public face' in supervision. The conclusion was a call for supervision to provide a forum for discussion of emotional responses in practice. The role of supervision is not just a therapeutic and supportive one. It could be argued that this style of supervision would also promote informed and reflective practice.

3.7 – Conclusion

This literature review has taken a two stage approach to surveying the literature relevant to emotions and social work. I firstly explored emotions from a theoretical and definitional perspective. This allowed me to establish a

conceptual framework, which will be referred to throughout this thesis and will provide a basis for conceptualising and contextualising the themes as they emerge. A key aspect of the conceptual framework was that it underlined the centrality of emotions in relation to the ways that individuals make sense of their world and in turn how they respond within it. I then surveyed the terrain in which emotions and emotional intelligence are discussed in relation to social work practice. The picture that emerges is a complex one in that despite a strong literature base relating to the relationship based aspects of practice, there is a competing and at times diametrically opposed literature base which constructs a technical/rational narrative of the profession of social work.

I have explored the concept of emotional intelligence and have forged links with service user perspectives and practice skills. This was coupled with consideration of the role of emotions within decision making and it was argued that emotions could have a central role within a decision making construct that also values rationality.

The place of reflection and supervision are well established in social work literature and these were reviewed in the context of emotions and emotional intelligence. This is conceptually pertinent as a key aspect of emotions is the role of appraisal and the use of individual and societal constructs to guide interpretation and presentation. It was noted that current visions of the

profession such as Munro (2011) make links between the value of the emotional content of practice and the use of supervision.

This review of the literature has led me to seek greater clarity about the reality of the role of emotions in social work practice. Much of the literature review has been at a theoretical level and the distance from practice experience and reality appears to be an interesting and important gap. This has led to the emergence of my core research questions (see below) which broadly seek to ask social workers about their experiences of the emotional aspects of their practice, and in turn to be able to provide much greater clarity about the potential operationalisation of the aforementioned visions of the profession and potential barriers.

1. What role do emotions have in social work practice?
2. Do social workers have an opportunity to explore, consider and use the emotional content of their work to inform their practice?
3. What are the challenges, issues and opportunities for considering the role of emotions and emotional intelligence in social work practice?

Chapter 4 - Methodology

4.1 – Introduction

The focus within this thesis on the role that emotions may have within the context of social work practice has an epistemological resonance with my own perspectives about the nature and design of this research. May (1996) highlights feminist perspectives and notes their usefulness in challenging and exploring the fundamental 'givens' of alternative approaches to research methodology. The key aspect of this resonance is the consideration I have given to the role and contribution that individual emotions, values and subjectivities can have on actions and decisions. This resonance can also be located within the paradigm of emotional reflexivity. Burkitt (2012) notes that when one (in this case both the researcher and the 'researched') reflexively considers one's choices and responses in relation to presenting information, one must consider the role emotions have in terms of directing and impacting upon choices and subjectivities. This is mirrored in critiques of positivist approaches to research and provides a useful basis for the exploration of my epistemological position.

The issue of values and research has a similar juxtapositional debate to the previously discussed debate concerning rational thought and emotion in that the relationship *between* values and process in social research is central, even if the desirability of its presence is contested. May (1996:39) suggests

that *"values not only enter the process of research but also inform it at all points"*. This suggests that the place of values in terms of the researchers and respondents must be acknowledged, and also utilised in the research design. Nagel(1961) suggests that value judgements can be categorised to create a picture of the degree to which a phenomenon is present (i.e. the degree to which emotions impact on social work practice). This notion of seeking the meaning of individual perspectives will be examined during this section and will be a key driver in terms of the methodology.

The structure of this chapter will present a largely chronological account of the epistemological foundations of my enquiry through to the development of the methodological approach and associated tools. This will allow the development of my approach to be viewed in a transparent, organic and inter-related manner. This will provide clarity about the drivers behind choices and decisions and sits comfortably with the notion of acknowledging the role of the researcher and other variables at play when developing an approach to research. In the context of this thesis, it will mean that the development of the survey questionnaire and the semi-structured interview phase will be presented in the order in which they happened rather than dealing with each one fully in turn.

4.2 - Positivism, feminism and establishing a starting point

Feminist critiques of research perspectives argue that the majority of research perspectives are male orientated and generated, and that when *"the roles of women are reconsidered in social life, they are characterised as passive and emotional"* (May, 1996:11). This disconnection between emotional perspectives and the construction of the research models can on one level be seen to perpetuate male-dominated constructions of the social world, and also directly chimes with the debate about the degree of congruence between reason and emotions which formed a key aspect of this thesis. May (1996) argues that the implied hierarchy of research approaches has objectivity and reason as the 'gold standard' of scientific research and more subjective schools of thought seen as in some way diluted and unreliable. Positivism as an approach to research strives for objective purity (Robson, 2002). The aim of positivism would be to seek 'truths' that are drawn from incontrovertible facts that have emerged from a values-free methodology. Robson recognises the limited applicability of positivism in the social world due to significantly lower levels of conjunction and consistency between variables. Simply put, it could be argued that individual differences in actions, values and context are too fluid in nature to establish concrete universal laws.

This discussion has much in common with the notion of social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), which proposes that the 'meanings' we attach to our experiences and indeed the way we actually experience things are impacted and influenced by social contexts (i.e. resources, education, gender, age etc). If we view this through a post-modern lens, then it is unsurprising that each individual viewpoint will be unique and unavoidably subjective. Neuman (1997) highlights the post-modern nature of this type of approach to research and notes that the researcher themselves must be visible and transparent in the process. This will be seen to have influenced my approach throughout the section.

I argue in this thesis that the role of emotions is inextricably involved and inherent in thought processes and associated actions in social work. This would appear to be in essence a feminist pursuit and one which has a fundamental influence on my approach to my thesis. This is a key area that has parallels with the debate explored within the thesis relating to emotions and social work practice. May (1996) argues that choice of subject matter and approach are always influenced by individual and external factors, and that we should not be constricted by one paradigm (i.e. seeking objectivity) but rather we can embrace and reflect upon a diverse range of approaches. Indeed, Robson (2002) notes that positivist scientific research should be approached with caution in that the sponsors of such research can have a very particular set of goals and motivations. This suggests that even the

most apparently value-free approach to research can be compromised by the choices made from the outset.

4.3 - Background of approach: getting the balance right

Robson (2002) proposes that the adoption of a realistic approach to research can still be driven by a scientific 'attitude'. This would entail the researcher being ethical, sceptical and systematic in their approaches to their research. A key aspect of the realism school of research is that the limitations and varied perspectives within a piece of research should be recognised and explicit. The findings from such a piece of research can highlight mechanisms which illustrate phenomena in certain conditions. There is an added caveat here, in that conclusions can explain what happened and highlight the variables that were at play, but do not claim to be able to predict future behaviours or actions. This takes us back to the point that variables in the social world are multifarious and not constant. Hence, concrete predictions about relationships between variables are difficult to arrive at. In relation to this thesis, I have posed questions about emotions and professionalism and the need for supervision. This sets the foundations for the exploration of the *mechanisms* underlying these (i.e. support for social workers) to reach recommendations and conclusions. Robson (2002) is keen to note that suggestions for changes to procedures are immediately influenced by the abilities, perceptions and context of the implementers.

This again seems to have a resonance with the focus of this thesis, in that a core driver behind my interest in emotions is the apparent inexplicability of actions (or lack of actions) of social workers in complex cases despite regular development and clarification of procedures (Ferguson, 2005). This reflects the very real presence and impact of individual abilities, emotions and interpretations on seemingly mechanistic procedures.

In this thesis, social workers were asked to discuss and reflect upon the role of emotions in their practice. I would argue that the study of social workers' accounts of their practice has an inevitable subjective edge, but that this is at the core of the focus of the thesis. The notion of 'biography' is crucial, in that the perspectives and interpretations that participants and researchers have of their actions and the social world in which these actions take place are important. I have broadened out the value that feminist approaches place on the inclusion of female voices and meanings to encompass a multiplicity of viewpoints which acknowledge that there is no one unified experience or interpretation of the social world, and that the focus of my research allows for a reflective and critical approach to the subject matter. This has much in common with the broader notion of emancipatory approaches to research which recognise and explore issues of power within research (Robson, 2002). In the case of this thesis, it was intended that consideration be given to the context and constraints in which social workers operate.

In the context of this thesis, it was important to examine the broad professional and policy context in which social work operates and also the impact that broader social phenomena have on social work practice such as media representation and socio-economic conditions. Indeed, during the course of accumulating data for this thesis the economic climate in the United Kingdom (and globally) had become very uncertain and respondents to the survey noted the impact and relevance of current pressures on resources.

It would be difficult and unsustainable to suggest that as a researcher I could adopt a positivist approach to the thesis which would set me apart from the subject matter as a detached observer. As a qualified social work practitioner and a current social work academic I can recognise that a key driver in selecting this area of research are my own professional reflections about the role of emotions in practice, and also a strong sense that emotions may play a pivotal role in guiding and/or obstructing positive social work practice. This position emerges from, and is inextricably linked to the meanings that I and others attach to the social world and more specifically social work practice. This stance strengthens and underpins the aforementioned congruency between the focus of the enquiry and the manner in which it will be undertaken, and indeed the construct of emotional reflexivity.

It is my belief that the views and meanings that social workers apply to their actions are a fundamental source of data when exploring the role of emotions

in practice. I would also argue that the process of examining one's own actions and motivations in practice is by its nature a reflective activity and one which requires subjectivity. May (1996) discusses the 'interpretative paradigm' in which the subjective views of respondents are valued and the researcher is charged with considering the shared meanings held by respondents. This paradigm has much in common with intersubjectivity. This most commonly refers to a level of agreement about a set of meanings. The concept of subjectivity can be viewed in broader terms which allows for a divergence of meaning and interpretation around a shared issue. I have selected the theoretical construct of emotional intelligence as a model to be considered and examined in relation to social work practice. In a sense this pursuit has been inductive in nature and has 'tested' the construct and its relevance. I would also argue that the linkages between emotional intelligence and social work practice are in their infancy, and as such it is important to adopt a deductive flexibility which does not make assumptions about applicability. This should be viewed as a positive aspect of the thesis in that it can add to the critical profile of emotions and emotional intelligence in relation to social work practice.

4.4 - Research design: exploring the role of emotions in social work practice

The above discussion provides a platform for considering approaches to the design of the research methodologies that were utilised in this project. I have noted that I accept that the self reporting and reflections of social work practitioners had an inevitable subjective element. I feel that an exploration of social work practice requires a degree of *realism* in that there are structures and processes within which social work practitioners operate, and these need to be acknowledged and *interpreted* in order to contextualise the actions and reflections of social workers. The emphasis on interpretation is to draw attention to the various levels in which interpretation exists within the design. May (1996) takes this discussion further to embrace an 'idealistic' approach which recognises the social world is based on competing interpretations and that the actions and options of those within it are unpredictable. Mason (2007) asserts that this explicit approach to design and the nature of the potential findings is a crucial aspect of social research.

It was important that the tools used in this thesis reflected the key themes from the preceding epistemological discussion. It has been recognised that the views of social workers will be influenced by context, subjectivities, emotions and abilities. There are some broad contextual similarities which will be shared across a group of social workers, but even these apparent

similarities (i.e. working within the same team and legislative context) were subject to individualised responses and perceptions.

I chose two key approaches to explore the role of emotions within social work practice. I will provide a brief rationale for each method and then examine each method in more detail. The two methods utilised were as follows:

- **Survey Questionnaires** – this technique is a key tool in 'real research' (Robson, 2002). I developed and issued a survey to all qualified social workers within a local authority regardless of context and focus of role. The survey allowed respondents to answer a structured set of questions that explored the multi faceted nature of emotions and practice.

- **Interviews** – A smaller cohort of social workers from the sample were interviewed following the collection of data via the survey. Respondents to the survey were given an opportunity to volunteer to be approached for an interview. The intention was to adopt a semi-structured approach which allowed for flexibility in terms of responses and questions and also encourage a degree of depth and analysis within the interview process itself. The themes explored within the interviews were drawn from the data collected in the survey.

4.5 - Survey questionnaires: challenges and considerations

The use of questionnaires has a familiarity and popular resonance which makes their usage appear at first glance to be intuitively cogent and manageable (Robson, 2002). The attractiveness of such a method is demonstrable by their ubiquitous use across marketing, political polling and popular opinion measurements. The design of questionnaires (unless administered in person) is by definition 'fixed' in terms of the construction and focus of the questions. This places a great deal of control and responsibility upon the researcher to ensure that the questions are meaningful, purposeful and understandable. If this is achieved, then this method allows for wide circulation and in turn potentially significant quantities of data pertaining to the focus of study. In this thesis this aspect was an attractive one, in that I was interested in the views and perceptions of a large cohort of social workers within a local authority in order to generate themes that would benefit from a more focused and responsive approach with a smaller cohort of respondents. I will pick up on this in the next section, which will look at the use of interviewing.

May (1993) suggests that questionnaires resonate with the notion of positivist approaches to research, in that the data derived from them can be viewed to provide quantifiable 'truths' about the subject matter and the social world inhabited by the respondents. Cohen (1979) shares this enthusiasm for the data derived from questionnaires and terms it as usable knowledge.

This links to my proposal in the preceding paragraph that themes emerging from the questionnaires would be, and indeed were, relevant to the construction and planning for the interviews. Both writers are also keen and willing to acknowledge the frailties of adopting such a positivist position. Robson (2002) notes that questionnaires provide data with limited depth and the context, and intended meaning of responses are inevitably left unexplored or subject to the interpretation of the researcher. It is also important to note that responses to questionnaires provide information on what people believe or think about an issue. This falls short of providing a picture of what people 'do' in practice. This potential gap is a crucial issue when making judgments about the meaning of the emerging data. I went some way to address this potential gap between self reported response and actual actions through the depth allowed through a semi-structured interview process. This still sat within the realms of realistic research in the sense that the data gathered through interviews was still associated with the subjectivity and selectivity of the interviewee and the ensuing interpretation by me as the interviewer. Indeed the less structured aspects of the interviews (for example my choice of follow up questions) allow for my own motivations and interests to permeate the direction of the interview. This is accepted within the paradigm of realistic research and contributes to the development of a 'meaning' to attach to the data. The key issue is that I maintain an awareness and transparency about these variables. I will explore the use of interviews in much more detail shortly.

The platform on which I presented the questionnaire was a key issue for consideration. At an early stage I decided that I would issue the questionnaire on a web-based location hosted by Bristol Online Surveys (BOS). My decision was determined by the agreement of the local authority to allow access to their social work staff and I had to consider which method would have greatest reach and usability. For example, a web based approach would only be useful if all respondents have access to computers through their employment. If this was not the case, then there would be a risk of unintentionally excluding a section of the sample, which in turn could be a reflection of role and position within an organisation. In discussion with the local authority it was agreed that the majority of communication with staff *was* via electronic means, and that all staff had routine access to the internet during their working day.

Robson (2002) emphasises the significant amount of time associated with the process of using a questionnaire approach, and highlights the potential risk of low response rate and the need for reminding recipients and possibly building in incentives such as a prize draw. I will pick up on the point about the time resource required later in this section. The decision not to engage with respondents in person with a questionnaire in my thesis was also based on resource issues relating to time and also the aspiration to reach a wider audience. There are potential pitfalls to my decision, but these are manageable. A key issue is that respondents were not able to seek clarification about the meaning of questions or any other queries associated

with the questionnaire. This can be minimised (if not overcome) by ensuring that questions are clear and straight forward and have been tested prior to formal circulation (Neuman, 1997).

Robson (2002:229) proposes the following process in relation to using questionnaires in research:

1. *Development of research questions, study design (including sample selection from pre-tests and main study), and initial draft of questionnaire.*
2. *Informal testing of draft questionnaire.*
3. *Revise draft questionnaire*
4. *Pre-test revised draft using interviews*
5. *Revise questionnaire again*
6. *Carry out main data collection interviews*
7. *Code data and prepare data files*
8. *Analyse data and write report.*

The above process is a useful illustration of the importance of ensuring that questions within a questionnaire are fit for purpose, and also that the use of questionnaires is actually resource intensive. I 'road-tested' my questionnaire in the manner described above to assure myself of the clarity and credibility of the questions and the intended nature of the responses. I will discuss this process later in this section.

It may be useful at this stage to discuss the importance of the consideration of the nature and intent of the questions to be used. This has a resonance with social work practice in terms of the importance of questions being accessible, anti-oppressive and with clear purpose (Lishman, 1994). As

noted above, it is crucial that questions are clear and well focused. This is heightened with questionnaires due to the lack of guidance available at the time of completion. The issue of clarity of purpose noted above should be seen as a key driver in determining the quantity and complexity of questions. Robson (2002) notes that response rates are influenced by the time commitment required to complete the survey and this is linked to the size of the questionnaire. I produced a questionnaire that could be completed in approximately 15 minutes. This was particularly relevant as I was asking workers to complete it within their busy schedules and did not want the task of completion to be off-putting when set against competing work-related tasks and activities. There are a plethora of question types which are covered in great detail in Lishman (1994). For the purposes of this discussion, I would wish to consider the familiar dichotomy of open and closed questions. Robson (2002) argues that the emphasis should be on closed questions in order to reduce the degree of interpretation (and the ensuing variability of data) that may occur. Closed questions are those which require a fixed response. For example, a simple question that requires a yes/no response is the most common type. The use of test scales such as the Likert Scale also give respondents fixed options to choose from (May, 1993). Closed questions can be very helpful in eliciting a view without the respondent having to articulate the complexity of the issue. This can of course be viewed as weakness, and links to the aforementioned criticism that questionnaires lack depth. It is important that such scaling of responses covers the range of possible view points. This is to avoid the respondent

feeling that their viewpoint is not captured by the responses on offer. Open questions invite a range and depth of responses that provide significant detail. This requires more time and thought on the part of the respondent and requires an ability to be able to articulate a response clearly. If this is deemed to be a reasonable expectation (and I felt it was in my study) then open questions can be used with good effect. The data that emerges from open questioning would need to be quantified in different ways, and Robson (2002) suggests the use of catergorisation which helps link common themes together from separate responses. This process of categorising it is argued will inevitably lose some depth and information during the process, however this process produces a type of data that is potentially *quantifiable*. Neuman (1997) helpfully suggests that the debate between open and closed questions is ill-advised and misguided, as they are not necessarily in opposition but that (as described above) they can be used purposively in combination or isolation.

Based on the preceding discussion, I developed a questionnaire that had been subject to testing prior to formal circulation. I produced a questionnaire that was accessible and able to be completed in approximately a 15 minute timescale. I used a mixed palette of questioning approaches but adopted a closed questioning approach for the main body of the questionnaire with an opportunity to respond to a limited range of open questions. I will explore the construction of the questionnaire in more detail later in this chapter.

4.6 - Constructing the interviews: towards depth and clarity

Burgess (1984) usefully described interviews as 'conversations with a purpose'. Burgess was emphasising that the apparently natural dynamic of two individuals discussing an issue is more complex when it is within an interview framework. Perhaps the most obvious issue is that the flow of conversation is more uni-directional than informal conversation in that the interviewer tends to ask questions and do more listening in comparison to the interviewee who is likely to undertake more of the talking. On one level it seems almost inappropriate to be reducing the activity of interviewing to a conversation. However, a key strength of interviewing is the potential for allowing a semi-structured approach to enable flexibility of focus which is bespoke to the individual interaction. This flexibility should be harnessed within a clear pre-determined structure. Neuman (1997) notes that despite apparent similarities to less structured social interactions, interviews contain a range of roles and norms that mark them out as distinct. For example, the interviewer has the benefit of prior knowledge of the questions to be asked and also has to balance the need to establish a rapport with the interviewee whilst maintaining a neutral and non-judgmental approach. Lishman (2009) notes that in relation to the dynamics of social work interviews, the interviewer is accountable for the use, analysis and dissemination of information. This rings true also for research based interviews and these

expectations and intentions need to be explicit from the outset. These issues are picked up in the following sub-section which discusses the ethical approval process of the University.

My intention was to develop an interview schedule which took cognisance of the importance of interviews having a sense of structure (i.e. a beginning, middle and end). The preceding discussion regarding approaches to questions has direct links to the development of an interview approach. I developed an interview questionnaire which had a range of pre-determined questions which were of a closed and open nature. These were located within themed sections which allowed for greater flexibility to enhance or reduce a particular focus depending on responses. The themed areas were identified through the open coding of the survey data. Open coding refers to the identification of broad themes and ideas that can be drawn from a set of quantitative data (Neuman, 1997). King (1994) notes that interviews can give a platform for themes to be explored and individual perceptions to be critically analysed in order to add further colour and depth to the more rigid type of data produced by the aforementioned use of questionnaires.

Robson (2002) warns that such flexibility within the approach can lead to a risk of bias. This is echoed by Mason (2007) who notes that the interviewer must reflect upon the impact they have on the interview process. This impact could be argued to include the selection of questions, the manner in which an interviewer presents themselves and the selectivity involved in the

recording and analysis of responses. It is at this stage that the clarity of one's epistemological position comes into play. I have already established my position in relation to the focus of my thesis more broadly and only through acknowledgement of my epistemological position can I meaningfully acknowledge the impact I may have on the research process. Mason goes on to suggest that the absence of such an explicit and reflexive approach undermines the validity and credibility of data produced. This discussion has great resonance within wider social work discourse in terms of reflective practice and the need for social workers to be able to consider their own value base and use of self in relation to their practice (Hennessey, 2011). Indeed, the focus of this thesis on the role of emotions within practice represents a similar paradigm in that it is concerned with the ability and opportunity for workers to acknowledge explicitly their emotional responses within their practice. Mason also notes that this explicit appraisal of one's impact must also be also be evident at the analysis stage. She suggests that there are 3 types of approach to interview data: *literal; interpretative; and reflexive*. The literal approach would entail reporting exactly what was said. The interpretative approach involves identifying meanings and themes from what has been said. The final approach combines the first two approaches and also requires the researcher to consider their role within the analysis. I have adopted a reflexive approach to this thesis.

A key driver in my decision to conduct interviews following the questionnaire was that the consideration of emotions and practice would benefit from

giving respondents the space and context within which to reflect upon their experiences and in turn articulate their perspectives. This was a powerful element of the approach as the subject matter (emotions and social work) and the purpose of the interviews (discussion about the experiences of emotions and social work) were closely aligned in terms content and process. Robson (2002) suggests that it is this facet of interviewing that lends itself so well to a multi-method approach. In this thesis, I view the interview process as being one which enhanced the data gathered through questionnaires by providing explanations and nuances otherwise absent.

4.7 - Establishing an agreement with a targeted Local Authority

I approached a Scottish local authority to ask if they would consider being the hosting local authority for my research. For the purposes of this thesis I will refer to the local authority as 'Local Authority X'. There were a range of reasons why I identified Local Authority X as a potentially ideal locus for my research. Firstly, I was familiar with the organisation from my own previous employment as a social worker. As a programme director of the BA (Hons) Social Work programme I had established close links with the local authority in relation to practice learning and also in producing graduates to be recruited into social work posts. This provided me with a strong and credible basis with which to undertake the negotiations required to seek approval to undertake the research. Local Authority X expressed an interest in providing

access to their social work workforce due to a commitment to engaging with research, but also that they would potentially benefit from the information generated about the emotional experience of social work within their locale.

The development of the questionnaire was influenced by concrete practical requirements that emerged within negotiations with Local Authority X. Firstly, from an administrative perspective it was agreed that the questionnaire be developed within an online tool. This was to ensure maximum reach in terms of the target group (qualified social workers within Local Authority X) and also minimize the time and organisation required by participants. All social workers within Local Authority X have access to computers and have staff email accounts. The University of Dundee has a relationship with Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) and all academic staff can establish an account with BOS to set up and conduct surveys. This survey tool met the aforementioned conditions and participants were simply provided with a web link contained within an introductory communication via their intra-net. The use of email had been considered, but due to the diverse roles and role titles held by qualified social workers within Local Authority X it was felt that the best way of potentially reaching all qualified workers was via an authority-wide announcement. Each time that a worker opens their staff online account, they view a 'homepage' which hosts a range of announcements, and it was within this page that my survey was placed. The data was then stored securely within the BOS website and could only be accessed by me via a password protected account. This approach to

constructing surveys has many benefits, but the principal one was that the survey tool stores, orders and presents the data gathered rather than requiring the researcher to track and collate the data. In addition to this, it was cost neutral and avoided research overheads such as stationary and postal costs.

Local Authority X agreed with the proposal that the survey would be followed up with semi-structured interviews. It was agreed that completion of the questionnaire and agreeing to participate in a follow-up interview would be entirely voluntary. Further to this each worker was required to give explicit consent at each stage in the process. This was a requirement of the University Ethics Approval Committee.

4.8 - University of Dundee research ethics approval process

The University of Dundee has a rigorous research ethics approval process which all proposed research projects are required to go through. The process is rigorous to ensure that research is ethical, safe, accountable and visible. Neuman (1997) suggests that researchers utilising questionnaires have to consider issues of privacy (i.e. avoid invasive personal questions), choice (the need for informed consent) and purpose (the validity of the questionnaire in relation to explicitly expressed aims). These issues were addressed through the ethical approval process. I found my journey towards

ethics approval to be more dynamic than a linear validation process might suggest. By proceeding with ethics approval one must consider all aspects of the proposed project and this helped to sharpen and clarify the methodology and structure of the project. I will present the key aspects of this process in relation to my research project and make explicit points about the development of the project through this process.

The University Ethics Committee ask that the following aspects of the project are considered:

1. *Title of project.*
2. *Purpose of project and its academic rationale.*
3. *Brief description of methods and measurements and how data will be stored.*
4. *Participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion / inclusion criteria.*
5. *Consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing.*
6. *A clear statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.*
7. *Estimated start date and duration of project.*

University of Dundee (2006)

The principal document produced for the ethics approval process and indeed the project itself was the Participant Information Sheet (PIS). This had to be produced for each section of the proposed project. These documents addressed many of the points required as noted above. The PIS explained the rationale of the project and presented the core research questions of this PhD thesis. The PIS for the questionnaire informed potential participants that they were being asked to complete an online survey and provided

sample questions so that they could envisage the nature of the questions. An example of the sample questions provided was:

5. "My emotions help me reach clear decisions"
○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Slightly agree ○ Slightly disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

In addition to this example, I provided a different type of question which highlighted that participants would also have an opportunity to provide a narrative style of response to certain questions. This took the form of a question followed by an expandable 'text-box" which allowed respondents to provide added depth and explanation and in turn produced a balance between quantitative and qualitative type data. The PIS also informed participants that the questionnaire would take approximately 15 minutes to complete. This was a purposeful timescale in that I recognised that I was asking participants to respond within their work environment. Finally the PIS made a clear statement about the confidentiality and security of results. It was also stated that data would be stored securely for no longer than 10 years.

The PIS for the interview phase of the project contained the same information explaining the focus of the research. It noted that the interviews would look at themes that emerged from the questionnaires. All interviews were to be recorded so that the data was complete and accurate. The PIS stressed that the participant could choose whether to have the interview

within their work setting or at the University of Dundee. This was in order to try minimise the disruption to the interviewee and to be sensitive to preferred environment and location. This is particularly cogent given the nature of the issues relating to the emotional experience of social work practice to be discussed. The document also noted that all data collected would be treated in the strictest confidence.

There was also an agreement that a schedule for the semi-structured interviews would be prepared and forwarded for approval once that phase was reached. The research proposal successfully attained full ethical approval and there were no concerns raised in relation to the purpose and content of the research design.

4.9 - Thesis research questions

The development of a survey questionnaire must always take cognisance of the central research questions so that the data produced is usable and relevant (Mason, 2002). It is worth at this stage revisiting the core questions at the heart of this thesis:

1. What role do emotions have in social work practice?

2. Do social workers have an opportunity to explore, consider and use the emotional content of their work to inform their practice?

3. What are the challenges, issues and opportunities for considering the role of emotions and emotional intelligence in social work practice.

4.10 - Pre-test pilot: checking that the questionnaire is fit for purpose

Mason (2002) emphasises the need to pilot questionnaires in order to examine whether the questions are understandable and produce the type of data that was anticipated and intended. Piloting the questionnaire was also a useful process in terms of testing the technical aspects of the online tool. The questionnaire was circulated to 18 qualified social workers in locations other than Local Authority X. Each respondent was asked to complete the survey and give feedback about the structure, content and time it took to complete.

This process identified previously overlooked typing errors and ensured that the final version of the questionnaire was well presented and accurate. One respondent noted that the reference to avoidance of service users in question 17 could actually be a very positive and appropriate response to a personal safety concern, rather than the implied sense that emotions led to a less desirable avoidance strategy. On balance I felt that this would be explored further in the narrative style questions and the semi-structured interviews. Both responses would be appropriate for the scope of that question, as the question was intended to elicit the potential impact of emotions rather than explore the desirability of it. There was also helpful feedback about question 22 which lists possible emotions that a social worker may have experienced in their previous three months of practice. The respondents made suggestions for additional emotions to be listed. Again, on balance, the

option to add additional emotions in a text box within the question should allow respondents to select any emotions that are not listed. It underlined in the pilot respondents were engaging with the subject matter and that individual experiences were varied and broad. All respondents reported that the survey had been interesting and was completed within 15 minutes. The key theme emerging from the pilot study was that the subject matter was interesting and relevant, and that the questionnaire helped respondents think and reflect about emotions and social work practice.

I reviewed the responses given by the participants in the pilot of the questionnaire in order to assess whether my questions were producing the anticipated type of data. It was also important for me to assess that the questions had been understood. This was picked up by the views expressed by the participants in their feedback but was usefully reinforced by looking at the emerging data. I was satisfied that data emerging from the pilot was relevant in terms of my research questions and respondents reported that the questionnaire facilitated their thinking about the subject.

Due to the modest amount of revisions required, I re-tested my amended questionnaire with only one of the initial group of testers to check that it was ready to be circulated.

4.11 - Issuing of questionnaire to Local Authority X

I have already discussed the agreement and arrangement with Local Authority X in terms of advertising the survey on the homepage of their intranet site. This was facilitated by the training section of the Social Work Department of Local Authority X and I was able to track the response rate via the BOS website. After 3 weeks, I asked for a reminder message to be issued to pick up any potential respondents who did not get around to doing it at the first request.

It was frustrating that Local Authority X could not give an exact figure for the amount of social workers they have working within their organisation, though they suggested approximately 250 social workers. There were 120 respondents in total and this finally became 112 usable surveys following filtering out surveys which had apparently been started and abandoned before the main body of questions were completed. This was a very pleasing response rate and the aforementioned 'background information' questions allowed the profile of the group to emerge. Respondents came from a broad range of contexts of social work practice and varied in terms of age, gender and level of experience. I will give a detailed presentation of the characteristics of the cohort within the results chapter.

4.12 - The thematic development of the semi-structured interviews

The approval of my research project contained a condition that I would update UREC with the themes that would be explored in the interviews. This was a two part process which fell short of requiring a full analysis of the survey data. The BOS website was able to visually and numerically present the responses to the Likert scale questions and I was then able to identify key messages emerging from the data. For example, the table below is an excerpt from the survey and provided me with a clear message about the place of emotions within report writing in social work. This in turn became part of a thematic grouping for the interviews (in this case: "Forums for exploring emotions").

8. "I write about my emotions in formal reports"			
Strongly agree:		1.0%	1
Agree:		1.9%	2
Slightly agree:		6.7%	7
Slightly disagree:		9.5%	10
Disagree:		45.7%	48
Strongly disagree:		35.2%	37

Table 3 – Example of questionnaire response to inform interview phase

The second part of my content analysis involved the coding of the qualitative responses to the survey. I conducted a content analysis of the survey data to pull out the emerging themes. Neuman (1997) describes the process of content analysis as being one which reveals the messages that one may not

be able see merely by reading the responses in a non-interpretive manner. Neuman goes on to draw an interesting parallel with the place of content analysis and feminist approaches to research as it values and uses the content and *meaning* of the views and experiences of individual respondents. This resonates with my previous discussion of my epistemological position in terms of valuing the subjective views of respondents. Padgett (2008) describes the iterative process of *open coding* as one where the researcher starts with some pre-conceived codes/categories which are derived from the focus of individual questions and then are added to as new connections and themes emerge. Padgett describes an organic manual approach where this involves coding directly onto printed responses and allows for sections of text to be linked to these codes (often multiple codes) and a picture of the nature and frequency of these codes emerges. I followed this process in relation to the free-text responses to the survey. I started the process with very broad codes such as "positive role of supervision". As I proceeded with this iterative approach, further unanticipated codes emerged such as "reference to safety when talking about emotions". This process inevitably leads to the need to re-evaluate codes and discern cluster groupings for each code to be contained within.

I have provided the interview schedule for the semi-structured interview in the appendices. It may be useful at this stage to note the four key thematic areas that emerged from my content analysis. These areas were then broken down to contain more specific questions, which reflected the

extended list of codings that emerged from the survey data. The broad areas were as follows:

- Emotions and social work
- Professionalism and emotions
- Forums for exploring emotions
- Organisational context and culture

4.13 - Conducting the interviews: exploring themes and seeking depth

All respondents to the survey questionnaire were given the opportunity to record their email address within the survey if they wished to be approached to undertake a follow-up interview. They were informed that the interviews would focus on themes emerging from the survey data set.

There were 42 respondents from the cohort of 112 that stated that they were willing to be approached to be interviewed. This was a very encouraging response and may have reflected the level of engagement inspired by the subject matter. At this stage, I had to make a decision about the method with which I would sample from this group. I had determined that I would want to interview 15 respondents in order to allow create a set of data that I felt would be manageable, representative and useful. I had initially considered an entirely random approach to the sampling of the interviewees. I discarded this approach on the basis that I wished to be strategic in my

approach as I was clearly seeking particular theoretical depth and focus. Patton (2002) suggests a range of types of purposive sampling and I used a hybrid of 3 of his suggested models. I will describe these below and give reasons for including each approach to this study.

- *Extreme case sampling* – this approach seeks to include the respondents whose responses are positioned at the outer limits of the wider response range. In the case of my thesis, it was those respondents who expressed a very strong view (positively or negatively) about the role of emotions in social work practice.
- *Maximum variation sampling* – this approach tries to capture representation from across a broad range of respondents. In my case, I was keen to have representation across the broad categories of social work practice (adult care, childcare and protection and criminal justice social work) and also representation across gender/age/experience characteristics. This process was clearly aided by the background information questions at the beginning of the survey.
- *Typical case sampling* – this approach indentifies respondents who typify the 'average' response profile of the group. In the case of my survey, this was facilitated by looking at the quantitative data and qualitative data to identify recurrent themes and emphasises. In many ways the process of developing the themes for the interviews contributed to this process.

Having identified my sample, I contacted each potential interviewee with the PIS and gave them a further opportunity to consider their offer to take part. All respondents approached readily agreed to take part (one later withdrew due to work pressures leaving me with a sample of 14). I had given flexibility to interviewees in terms of location and 4 chose to meet me in my office at the University, and the remaining 10 all chose to meet me in meeting rooms within their work settings. The informal feedback about this suggested the pressure of time within the working day was a key driver for meeting me within their workplaces. Those that chose to meet me at the University cited the benefit of "getting away from the office" as being a key factor.

Each interview followed the same format with a range of pre-conceived questions and thematic areas and flexibility to explore ideas and issues as they arose throughout the interviews. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) highlight that interviewing is not a passive and mechanical pursuit, rather the process should be active, analytical and intellectual and requires a great deal of effort from the interviewer. They contend that the data that emerges from such an approach will be deeper, relevant and more revealing. I brought to the process significant experience of interviewing techniques from a social work perspective and had anticipated the unpredictable nature of the direction of interviews. Mason (2007) notes that regardless of the apparent control that a semi-structured approach may provide, it requires the ability to think and react to responses and be able to identify meanings and importance 'on the

spot'. This was certainly true of my interviews, and I found the process organic in that my understanding about my thesis developed during and *between* interviews. I found the latter phenomenon particularly interesting in that my understanding of my own thematic areas of interest developed and sharpened as each interview was conducted. This had the effect of changing the content of the aforementioned active role by alerting me to new areas of interest or resonances with previous interviewees. This reflects the subjective nature of the interviewing process in that my developing narrative about what was emerging and important was constructed by me. For example, an early interviewee raised the point that they had never *written* reflectively about their practice experiences since qualifying as a social worker. This prompted me to explore reflective writing and refection more broadly in subsequent interviews.

All interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes and all respondents verbally stated that they had found it interesting and relevant to their practice experience. Mason (2010) explored the concept of *data saturation* in relation to qualitative data. Put simply, this refers to the point where the data emerging from the use of a particular tool ceases to produce new or differing perspectives/information. I felt this sense of saturation emerging during the final 3 interviews. This was a frustrating feeling at the time, however after reflection it confirmed that my sample size was appropriate and that I had attained the quantity and breadth of data I had sought. I was able to determine that due to the thorough approach to the development of the

interview structure and the sampling method used that I could be satisfied that I had not simply sought too narrow a field of enquiry. This reinforced and validated my decision to precede the interviews with the survey questionnaire in order to establish the thematic landscape and in turn sidestep inadvertently pursuing inappropriately focussed interviews.

All interviews were recorded. This was communicated beforehand and was not presented as an option. All respondents agreed in advance to this so it was not an uncomfortable negotiation or surprise at the start of the interviews. The reason I chose to record each interviews was to ensure accuracy and to avoid the potentially distracting and obtrusive practice of note taking. These 'sound files' were then stored within a password protected area of my University computer account.

4.14 - Reflexivity within the research process

As discussed previously, the internal research ethics process within the University of Dundee required me to demonstrate that the focus, design and content of my research is consistent with ethical research practice. Issues such as consent, confidentiality, clarity of purpose and use of data are covered thoroughly. It could be argued that there is one area which could not be picked up so clearly in the required documentation, and that is the impact of my actions, decisions and presence within the course of the research being carried out.

Blakely (2007) notes that there are potential blind spots for researchers who seek a positivist values free approach in that the impact of their own values and emotions goes unchecked. This was not the case in this research, as from the outset I recognised the drivers for my research being partly based on my experience as a social work practitioner and social work academic. These experiences provided me with 'the hunch' or platform to consider the study of emotions in social work practice as interesting and cogent. Such drivers, potentially could lead me to design and conduct a piece of research which reflected my interests and emphases at the expense of allowing the data to emerge with minimal influence from myself.

Finlay (2002) emphasises the need for reflexivity within the research process. This reflexive approach can entail thinking about the subjectivities and inter-personal dynamics that I bring to my research. Indeed, Campbell (2001) suggests that such processes contribute to an important stream of data within research outputs. In this section I will consider some key issues that arose or were anticipated during the process of the research and account for the challenges and opportunities encountered.

In terms of the circulation of the survey questionnaire, my contact with respondents was distant. In saying that, I need to acknowledge that I was known within the Local Authority due to previous professional associations, and some respondents would possibly have preconceptions about my interest in the topic. The clarity about the purpose of the questionnaire explained

within the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and the anonymity guaranteed by the online survey process will have helped to ameliorate any previous assumptions and/or concerns about my relationships with them outside of the research process.

The construction of the survey questionnaire was a crucial phase in which to reflect upon my potential impact. I was purposeful in the combination and ordering of questions to minimize any assumptions or views of mine directing the questions in a manner which might influence the answers in a particular direction. I did this by purposefully randomising the order of the questions so that thematic clusters were less discernible and in turn less influential. I also constructed questions to explore the same issues, but from different perspectives. For example, in relation to exploring the presence of emotions within decision making in practice, I presented the following statements:

- "I feel I can remove emotions from my practice and decision-making"
- "My emotions help me reach clear decisions"

The above example allows respondents to approach this issue from a positive or negative perspective and also re-tests viewpoints from a differing angle.

The interview phase of the research process presented further challenges. I have discussed elsewhere in this methodology chapter the approach to selecting the cohort of respondents to be approached for interview. I

explicitly chose a sample that represented the broad range of viewpoints and contexts to reduce the opportunity to select a cohort (or randomly leave it to chance) which might have produced data in line with my own views or expectations.

The interview process was a very powerful phase of the research as it involved me becoming directly involved in the focus and direction of data collection. Duncombe and Jessop (2002) discuss the use of interviewing skills and the need to create environments in which participants feel able to express their views. Holland (2007) notes that this places the researcher in a position of power, and that the quest for rich data further influences the approach to interviewing. I utilised doctoral supervision during the interview phase to explore my role within the process and was very conscious of the iterative nature of interviewing 14 people consecutively. By this I mean that the semi structured aspect of my approach allowed room for me to formulate bespoke questions relating to the answers given within interviews. As noted previously, and crucially, this was also influenced by data collected in previous interviews as key themes began to emerge. For example, an issue was raised in an early interview about the lack of opportunity to engage in reflective writing once qualified. This interested me in terms of the content of our social work programmes, and in turn underpinned my focus on this within subsequent interviews. This is just one example of the subjective influence that one can have as a researcher. The use of extensive qualitative materials in the results helps to cast a light on how themes emerged and I

purposefully present a range of perspectives to add depth and balance to the resulting analysis.

A further ethical issue that may have arisen within the interview phase was the impact that the discussion of the topic of emotions would have on participants. The data reflects the richness and openness offered by interviewees in terms of their willingness to explore the emotional experiences within their practice. I was surprised by the willingness of all interviewees to share aspects of their practice and engage in meaningful exploration and reflection about their experiences, however the fact that interviewees self selected themselves as being available for interview may have been an indication of their commitment to engage. Additionally, the choice of location was given to the interviewee, which would have further added to their sense of control. The approach to the interviews underpinned by a significant use of open questioning, and this allowed interviewees to choose the extent and nature of their responses. This again allows a degree of control over content and the associated emotions to be held by the interviewee. I made a clear declaration about upholding anonymity and confidentiality in terms of using the transcribed data. If interviewees had shared information which they then felt they would want removed, I would have agreed to do this. In retrospect, this was not made explicit, though did not transpire to be an issue.

The extent to which participants spoke with openness, clarity and honesty surprised me during the interviews and within the free text responses in the questionnaire. I was very conscious that participants in both phases developed and finessed their own views and understandings about the emotional content of their practice through thinking and reflecting about their answers to questions. This further underlined the subjective edge to seeking data via questionnaires and interviews, and also highlights that responses from participants are not a fixed entity. I have noted elsewhere in this chapter the notion of 'data saturation'. It was important for me to reflect upon my feelings in regard to this phenomenon as it was a source of anxiety in terms of the quality of the final interviews. By reflecting upon this stage in the process and underpinning it with reading about data saturation, I was able to contextualise the increasingly familiar themes emerging and in turn not devalue or dismiss the data from these later interviews as less interesting or pertinent.

During the process of the interview phase, I considered whether it would be desirable to convene focus groups to drill further down into the emerging issues. This would have allowed for the sharing of ideas and debate about the emerging themes and what these might collectively mean to the participants. On balance, I took cognisance of the removal of anonymity and confidentiality that had been a hallmark of the questionnaire and the interviews. Due to the compact structure of Local Authority X and the possible professional relationships and roles of the participants, it seemed

that this may in fact produce a rather oppressive environment. In the light of the emerging issue of 'safety' this seemed particularly cogent.

The results and analysis within this thesis are influenced by the clear aim stated from the outset: namely the emphasis on seeking the views and narratives of social workers in terms of emotions and their practice. This approach helps to reduce the potential for my research being overly deterministic, and I was keen to allow the themes to emerge from this enquiry rather than imposing my expectations or pre-judgements. There are of course limits as noted above in terms of the focus and content of questions, but it allows for a greater sense of balance.

4.15 - Method of analysis – making sense of the data

The survey data was received, stored and quantified within the BOS website. This site enabled me to explore the qualitative and quantitative responses of participants. The website has a range of data analysis tools and a key one utilised in this thesis is that of cross-tabulation. This involved pitching the responses to various questions against each other to see consistencies, trends and anomalies within the data. I also exported the data in to Microsoft Excel. This helped me in particular to track the responses of individuals and to make clearer links between the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the data set.

All interviews were recorded digitally and stored as sound files on a PC. These sound files are very easily to navigate onscreen using 'Windows Media Player' and provide a permanent and readily usable record of each interview. Padgett (2008) notes that audio recordings omit all the non-verbal nuances of an interview and may deprive the researcher of the actual meanings and context of responses. Due to this reason I undertook the task of transcription as close to the actual interviews as possible. This helped me to recall the interview (albeit through the lens of reflection and memory) and a degree of the feelings and context of each interaction. Robson (2002) suggests that transcription need not be a written record of every utterance within an interview, rather it can focus on key passages and quotations. This was the approach I undertook due to the aforementioned usability of the audio files and also consideration of resources such as time. This process allows the researcher to focus on the key elements of an interview. I found this process time consuming but very enlightening, and I was glad that I undertook the transcriptions myself as it allowed for the cognitive and reflective process of coding and understanding to begin. I exported the interview transcriptions into Atlas-ti software. Weitzman & Miles (1995) highlight the usefulness of this software for allowing researchers to attach multiple codes to text documents and to be able to record and manipulate the coded tracts of text in order to explore themes and the possible overlaps between them. This sat comfortably with my intention to explore the views and experiences of social workers in relation to the emotional aspects of their practice.

In the following three chapters I will present my findings from my data collection which is derived from the methodology discussed in this section.

Chapter 5 – Results - Introduction to the data set

5.1 Examination of background information of survey questionnaire respondents

This thesis has produced two streams of data. Firstly, the survey questionnaire has produced a wealth of quantitative and qualitative data due to the mixed palette of questions used within the survey (as detailed in the methodology discussion). The second stream of data has emerged from the transcriptions of the interviews. This data has been examined with the use of Atlas-ti software to identify themes and meanings within the data.

The themes explored with participants in the interviews were derived from the survey questionnaire data. This has led to explicit and helpful synergies between the two sets of data and established a relationship between them from the outset. This has allowed me to approach the data sets in tandem and my analysis and presentation of the data reflects the interwoven nature of emerging themes and findings.

I will present the results of my research thematically and will use and link data from across the two data sets to illustrate and illuminate these themes. By approaching it this way, the structure is in a sense a product of the analysis of data as opposed to presenting the data and then pulling out key

themes afterwards or concurrently. I have chosen this approach as I believe it provides a clear platform for the data to be examined and also it reflects my 'realistic' approach to my research in that it recognises and illustrates my role and impact as a researcher (Robson, 2002). Padgett (2008) notes the importance of transparency when it comes to the subjective and interpretative aspects of data analysis, rather than the researcher being omnipresent yet covert.

5.1.1 Comparison of cohort of respondents with national workforce profile

In this section, I will present some of the key features of the survey data to establish the nature and scope of the responses and to lay the foundations for the subsequent thematic presentation of the results. I will clarify the profile of the cohort of participants as these will be linked to the analysis of the data at each stage.

There were 120 respondents in total to the survey questionnaire. 8 of these surveys were unusable due to them being almost entirely incomplete. These surveys were removed from the data set and this left 112 surveys, which will form the body of data to be analysed in this thesis.

It is important to note at this stage that not all respondents answered each question. This means that on occasion the amount of respondents will vary

from 112. For example, only 105 respondents responded to statement *"I write about emotions in formal reports".* The percentages noted in each table relate only to the responses reported.

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the cohort of respondents in terms of gender and age. I compared these with the statistical report on the 'Staff of Scottish Local Authority Social Work Services 2010' (Scottish Government 2011) which provided me with a comparative benchmark with which to map the profile of my cohort. This report concerned social workers employed within Scottish local authorities. The numbers produced by the Scottish Government were based on 'whole time equivalent' (WTE) rather than precise numbers of workers. Simply put, it added part time posts and full time posts together to produce an overall figure. The report was particularly useful in that it shed light on the WTE of the local authority I had been involved with. The total number of useable responses from Local Authority X was 112. The total number of WTE social workers in this authority was 189. It is not possible to be exact in terms of proportion, but it is clear that this was a very positive response rate from social workers across the authority.

The national median age reported for the social workers in post in October 2010 was 47 years old. This is mirrored by the profile of my cohort in that the most common age band cited was 41-50 years of age (see table 4).

The gender balance of social workers across Scotland was reported as in 84.2% female and 15.8% male. It is clear that the profile of my cohort mirrors the significantly female dominated profile of the wider social work workforce whilst containing slightly greater representation of males.

1.a. Gender			
Male:		25.9%	29
Female:		74.1%	83
1.b. Age			
21-30:		16.1%	18
31-40:		20.5%	23
41-50:		33.0%	37
51-60:		25.0%	28
60+:		5.4%	6

Table 4 – profile of respondents by gender and age

The comparison described above is relatively crude, but gives me confidence that my cohort reflects the wider national social work workforce picture in terms of gender and age and as such is credible and representative. I will consider the use of the term 'representative' after presenting a further breakdown of the cohort.

Respondents were asked to identify their *"Area of practice (i.e. service user group and/or focus of work)"*. I clustered the responses into 4 broad groups: adult care, children & families, criminal justice and 'other'. Table 5 provides further detail in terms of the components of these clusters.

Adult care N – 37 respondents	**Children and Families N-47 respondents**	**Criminal Justice N-18 respondents**	**Other N-10 respondents**
Adults (N-13)	Child Protection (N-4)	Criminal Justice Social Work (N-18)	Generic duty/access teams (N-5)
Physical disabilities (N-5)	Fostering/Adoption (N-6)		Hospital social work (N-1)
Drug and Alcohol (N-5)	Children and Families (N-34)		Development work (N-4)
Mental Health (N-8)	Residential care (N-3)		
Older People (N-6)			

Table 5 – breakdown of practice contexts

Table 5 reflects the broad range of contexts in which my cohort of respondents operate, and covers all the key areas of practice within local authority X.

Respondents were asked to state their role title. This question was intended to illustrate the broad range of roles within each practice context. The responses have a subjective edge in that some respondents may have provided quite specific detail (i.e. senior officer – through care and after care) whilst others chose to describe their role more simply as 'social worker'. In 'table 6' I have considered the responses and clustered them into 3 broad staff groupings: social workers, senior social workers and social work managers. This helps to clarify the balance of the respondents despite the dependence on how respondents articulated their roles in response to the question. The breakdown reflects the broad range of perspectives within the data.

Social Workers	Senior Social Workers	Social Work Managers
N- 81	N - 10	N - 21

Table 6 – roles within the cohort of respondents

Table 7 illustrates the cohort in terms of years of experience. It was interesting to note the volume of relatively newly qualified social workers (i.e. 1-5 years experience) and those with over 20 years experience. This provides a good balance of experience and reflects a diverse staff group. These figures and those above in terms of role are not able to be matched against the type of data available about the national workforce.

Years of qualified experience	Number in each age range
Less than 1 year	N - 10
1-5 years	N - 25
6-10 years	N - 23
11-15 years	N - 13
16-20 years	N - 15
Over 20 years	N - 26

Table 7 – years of qualified experience

This section has provided an overview of the profile of the respondents to the survey questionnaire. The published workforce data provides a national profile with which to map my cohort's profile. As noted above, the data sets were not exact matches in terms of focus and content, but do provide a persuasive guide to trends and themes in terms of workforce profile in Scotland. It is clear that the profile of my cohort is similar in profile and as such fits within the parameters of the 'real world' approach to sampling proposed by Robson (2000:267) which recognises the difficulties in achieving (or indeed being able to know if one has achieved) a representatives sample, but being satisfied that the sample is "reasonably typical" of the population.

5.1.2 Examination of profile of cohort of interviewees

I have detailed within the methodology chapter my approach to selecting the cohort of respondents for the interview phase of my data collection. There were 42 respondents who provided their details within their survey responses which indicated their willingness and consent to be approached for a follow-up interview. I adopted a purposive sampling approach that sought to achieve a balanced representation of viewpoints, gender, age and context of practice.

The process of determining gender, age and context was straightforward due to the background information required of respondents in the questionnaire. Determining a range of viewpoints was challenging due to the complex responses within each survey. For example, it was not uncommon for respondents to state that they felt that emotions should be removed from decision-making and the written recording of practice, but yet had a clear view that "emotions were at the heart of social work practice". I will explore these issues in much more detail in forthcoming sections, but it highlights the difficulty in pinning down a coherent view of emotions. As a consequence of this, I established 3 broad clusters of responses:

1. Positive view of emotions and social work
2. Negative view of emotions and social work
3. Mixed view of emotions in social work

It should be noted that no set of responses sat neatly in each category. I took particular cognisance of questions that directly sought the views of respondents in terms of the role emotions. An example of this was *"I feel I can remove emotions from my practice and decision making".* By focusing on a combination of such questions, I was able to place each respondent into the broad clusters noted above. This was central to my sampling approach as I was interested in seeking greater depth and understanding about the range of perspectives present in the survey, rather than inadvertently identifying a homogenous group of respondents who were only differentiated by factors such as age and gender.

The following series of tables (tables 8-12) provide the breakdown of the interview respondents across the aforementioned characteristics. It should be noted that my intention was not to replicate proportionally the profile of the cohort of respondents to the survey questionnaire. This was in part due to the added variable of the 'categorisation of viewpoints', but also to seek depth in terms of the context of practice settings. In addition to this, my pool of potential interviewees was determined by the self-selection of survey respondents in terms of their willingness to be approached for a follow up interview.

Gender	**Number in each category**
Female	N - 9
Male	N - 5

Table 8 – profile of interview respondents by gender

Age range of respondents	Number in age range
21-30 years old	N- 2
31-40 years old	N- 5
41-50 years old	N- 3
51-60 years old	N - 4

Table 9 – profile of interview respondents by age range

Context of practice	Number in each context
Children and families	N - 5
Adult care	N - 5
Criminal justice	N - 4

Table 10 – profile of interview respondents by context of practice

Roles within agency	Number within each role
Social worker	N - 9
Senior social worker	N - 3
Social Work managers	N - 2

Table 11 – profile of interview respondents by role

Category of viewpoint	Number in each category
Positive view of role of emotions	N - 5
Negative view of role of emotions	N - 5
Mixed view of role of emotions	N - 4

Table 12 – profile of interview respondents by category of viewpoint through analysis of survey responses

The tables above illustrate that I achieved a heterogeneous cohort of respondents which represent the key identifying characteristics present within the survey questionnaire. It is important of course to view each respondent holistically and acknowledge that the aforementioned characteristics provide a limited understanding of each person. For example, the social work managers also had a wealth of experience in different roles to draw upon, and could speak from multiple perspectives in terms of this experience. Similarly, the process of the interview allowed respondents to reflect, think and develop their ideas in relation to the subject matter and in turn my perceptions of their viewpoints changed. This is in many ways a

reflection of the strength of adopting this dual method approach to data collection (namely the survey and interviews) as it allows for ongoing refinement and exploration of emerging themes. I will explore this further in later sections.

5.2 Emotions and social work – practice context and gender

The survey was constructed to allow me to consider a range of characteristics in relation to the role of emotions in social work practice. In this section I will consider gender and the context of practice to explore whether there were notable differences across these domains.

The tables below cross tabulate 3 key Likert scaled questions relating to the role of emotions. They touch on three core themes: emotions and the profession; empathy; and the written articulation of emotions.

6. "Emotions and feelings are compatible with being a social work professional"	Male	Female	Totals
Strongly agree	5	15	**20**
Agree	18	40	**58**
Slightly agree	5	15	**20**
Slightly disagree	0	6	**6**
Disagree	0	3	**3**
Strongly disagree	0	1	**1**
No Answer	1	3	**4**
Totals	**29**	**83**	**112**

Table 13 – Cross tabulation of questions 6 and 1a

*Results are cross tabulated by question "1.a. Gender"

* The horizontal axis is split across gender lines and the vertical axis are the responses to the question *"Emotions and feelings are compatible with being a social work professional."*

8. "I write about my emotions in formal reports"	Male	Female	Totals
Strongly agree	0	1	**1**
Agree	1	1	**2**
Slightly agree	4	3	**7**
Slightly disagree	3	7	**10**
Disagree	12	36	**48**
Strongly disagree	7	30	**37**
No Answer	2	5	**7**
Totals	**29**	**83**	**112**

Table 14 – Cross tabulation of questions 8 and 1a

* Results are cross tabulated by question "1.a. Gender"

* The horizontal axis is split across gender lines and the vertical axis are the responses to the question *"I write about my emotions in reports."*

11. "Being able to have and express empathy in my practice is important"	Male	Female	Totals
Strongly agree	12	39	**51**
Agree	12	35	**47**
Slightly agree	3	5	**8**
Slightly disagree	0	0	**0**
Disagree	0	1	**1**
Strongly disagree	0	0	**0**
No Answer	2	3	**5**
Totals	**29**	**83**	**112**

Table 15 – Cross tabulation of questions 11 and 1a

* Results are cross tabulated by question "1.a. Gender"
* The horizontal axis is split across gender lines and the vertical axis are the responses to the question *"Being able to have and express empathy in my practice is important."*

For the purpose of drawing out the percentages of responses, I will omit the 'no answer' responses. In table 13 it can be seen that 100% of the males who responded to the question felt that emotions were compatible with the social work profession. 87.5 % of the females who responded agreed with this viewpoint. The question about whether social workers write about emotions within their reports found that 81.4% of males and 93% of females felt they would not write about emotions in their reports (table 14). Finally, in relation to empathy being important within practice relationships, 100% of males and 95% of females agreed with this statement (table 15). These questions provoked significant clusters of responses within one type of response (agree/disagree) and these were similar in both gender groups. Saying that, I was not expecting to see a higher degree of agreement about

the role of emotions from male workers due to perceived cultural expectations about gender often suggesting that men are less likely to express emotions (Turner and Stets, 2005). Although there are variations, for the purposes of this thesis I will examine the data across the entire cohort of respondents rather than filter these specifically through the lens of gender.

The following tables focus on the same three questions but I have examined them in relation to the practice context clusters that I identified in the previous section. It is worth reiterating here that differing amounts of people answered each question, and there are a small number of participants not represented below.

Emotions and feelings are compatible with being a social work professional	**Children and families**	**Adult care**	**Criminal Justice**	**Other**
Agree (all levels)	N=44 93.6%	N=31 91.2%	N=15 88.2%	N=8 80%
Disagree (all levels)	N=3 6.4%	N=3 8.8%	N=2 11.8%	N=2 20%

Table 16 – Comparability of emotions and practice context

I write about my emotions in formal reports	**Children and families**	**Adult care**	**Criminal Justice**	**Other**
Agree (all levels)	N=4 4.6%	N=3 9.1%	N=1 5.9%	N=2 22.2%
Disagree (all levels)	N=42 95.4%	N=30 90.9%	N=16 94.1%	N=7 77.8%

Table 17 – Emotions and formal report writing and practice context

Being able to have and express empathy in my practice is important	Children and families	Adult care	Criminal Justice	Other
Agree (all levels)	N=46 97.9%	N=34 100%	N=17 100%	N=9 100%
Disagree (all levels)	N=1 2.1%	N=0 0%	N=0 0%	N=0 0%

Table 18 – Empathy and practice context

The tables above reflect a broad consensus across practice contexts in relation to the three key questions. The percentages are included in the tables to allow for easy reference, and as with gender (and indeed even more strikingly) these responses suggest that it is appropriate to examine the cohort as a whole. I will of course be exploring the qualitative responses with the survey and interviews, which may allude to contextual differences in relation to individual experiences.

5.3 Introduction to the analysis of the results

The following sections of this chapter will explore the data emerging from the survey questionnaire and the interviews. As noted previously, I have constructed my results section around the thematic areas that were identified between the survey questionnaire phase and the interview phase. This helps to provide a structure that allows for greater synergies between the sets of data and in turn helps to provide clarity and focus to the reporting of the results.

The excerpts from the interview data have been recorded and analysed using Atlas-ti software. This software allows the researcher to assign codes to sections of the transcript texts in order to develop meanings, understandings and relationships within the data. The full list of codes used is contained within the appendices, though I will make direct reference to codes within the text also. I will report on the data emerging from the survey questionnaires and present these in connection to the interview data, whilst also cross tabulating the data within the survey to shed light on relationships between responses. There is a wealth of qualitative responses within the survey data which will also be drawn upon to add further depth and meaning to the data.

The task of presenting the views of 112 survey respondents and 14 interviewees is a complex one. There will be many respondents to the survey data who will be reported as part of wider groupings and not individually identified. There will be some survey respondents whom I will wish to highlight in particular and these respondents will be given annonymised names. Similarly, I will adopt the annonymised named approach with all interview respondents. This is clearly to uphold their confidentiality, but also presentationally the use of names may help to bring to life the data set rather than it being presented in a detached manner. This sits comfortably with my epistemological approach in terms of valuing the individual perspectives of the respondents. I will also explicitly explore and reflect upon my own choices, subjectivities and motivations throughout the

reporting of the results in order to reflect a genuine realistic approach to research (Robson, 2002) which takes cognisance of the role and impact of the researcher.

I will present the findings and key themes from the data in two discreet chapters. These will be grouped as follows:

Chapter 6

- Emotions: the complex relationship with social work practice
- Emotions and work with service users
- Emotions and the written aspects of practice

Chapter 7

- Emotions and professionalism
- Emotions and organizational context

I have chosen to approach each subsection with the same format in that I will begin by highlighting the emergence of key themes through the qualitative data within the survey. These themes will be further explored through cross-tabulation and links to the free-text responses within the survey data. I will then identify how these findings informed the construction of the interview phase and report on the in-depth discussions that occurred within that phase.

Chapter 6 - Results – Emotions: practice, service users and recording

6.1 – Introduction

In this chapter I will approach the data set from three perspectives. Firstly, I will explore the complex picture that emerges within the data regarding the role of emotions within social work practice. Secondly, I will focus specifically on what the data tells us about the role of emotions within relationships and practice with service uses. Finally, I will explore a key theme regarding the marginalised place of emotions within the written recording of practice.

6.2 - Emotions – the complex relationship with social work practice

A key question at the core of my thesis is concerned with exploring and establishing the role of emotions within social work practice. Clearly, all aspects of the data examine this to a greater or lesser extent, but there were key questions within the survey which were intended to elicit direct responses relating to this issue. This was an important area that I looked to when undertaking the interim analysis of the survey data in order to develop the themes to inform the interview phase. In this section I will begin by presenting a range of the responses to these questions and consider the relationships and meanings that emerge from them. I will then present a

selection of individual survey profiles which will place these generic themes under greater scrutiny. The survey data will be also be placed along side the interview data add further depth and clarity to the emerging picture.

The first Likert scaled question was constructed to approach the issue of emotions from a deficit perspective in that it asked respondents to consider whether *"feelings cloud clear thinking and decision making"*. Table 1 provides the range of responses to this.

Feelings cloud clear thinking and decision making"			
Strongly agree:		2.8%	3
Agree:		13.0%	14
Slightly agree:		36.1%	39
Slightly disagree:		11.1%	12
Disagree:		29.6%	32
Strongly disagree:		6.5%	7
Don't know:		0.9%	1

Table 19 – Responses to "Feelings cloud clear thinking and decision making

Table 19 provides a clear depiction of the lack of consensus in relation to the negative impact that feelings and emotions may have on decision making in social work practice. The cohort is split between 56 respondents who agree to some extent that feelings cloud decision making and 51 who disagree. This echoes the debates played out within the literature regarding the relationship that emotions have with thought and decision making. It also reflects the debates within social work literature which consider the

desirability of technicist approaches and/or relationship based approaches to practice.

This debate is further played out when respondents were asked to respond to the same question but from a positive standpoint. The question was put in terms of their views about the statement *"my emotions help me reach clear decisions".* The responses were similarly split in that 56 agreed with this 51 disagreed. It may be useful at this point to offer the cross tabulation of these two questions to clarify if these respondents maintained their view across the two questions (table 20).

5. "My emotions help me reach clear decisions"								
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Slightly agree**	**Slightly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**No Answer**	**Totals**
Strongly agree	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Agree	0	1	9	4	7	2	0	0
Slightly agree	0	4	11	3	11	1	0	0
Slightly disagree	0	4	12	4	6	1	1	0
Disagree	2	5	4	1	7	2	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
No Answer	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
Totals	3	14	39	12	32	7	1	4

Table 20 – Cross tabulation between questions 5 and 2

*Results are cross tabulated by question 2. "Feelings cloud clear thinking and decision making"

*The results pertaining to the statement "my emotions help me reach clear decisions" are presented along the horizontal axis

The cross tabulation of the two questions did show that the majority of respondents stayed within the same viewpoint. However, more striking are those who were not consistent. For example, 26 of the respondents who felt that feelings clouded decision making felt that their emotions *help* them reach clear decisions. Similarly, 21 of those who felt that feelings did not cloud decision making felt that emotions did not help them reach clear decisions. This suggests that the role of emotions in social work when approached in this manner is rather opaque. As a researcher I felt rather unclear about what this might mean in terms of the core of my inquiry and considered whether the mixed profile of responses reflected ambivalence to the issue. This was in at least part answered by the response to the question relating to whether *"emotions and feelings are compatible with being a social work professional".* This question was purposefully constructed to make the potential link between not only social work as an activity but crucially the notion of social work as a profession. This was in response to the contested conceptions of social work as a profession and the precarious role that emotions seem to inhabit within it. Table 21 provides the response of the cohort to this question:

6. "Emotions and feelings are compatible with being a social work professional"			
Strongly agree:		18.5%	20
Agree:		53.7%	58
Slightly agree:		18.5%	20
Slightly disagree:		5.6%	6
Disagree:		2.8%	3
Strongly disagree:		0.9%	1

Table 21 – Reponses to "Emotions and feelings are compatible with being a social work professional"

It is clear from this response that the 90.7% of respondents agreed to some extent that emotions were compatible with being a social work professional. This sits comfortably with recent messages in the Munro Report in Child Protection (Munro, 2011) which highlight the emotional content of practice and raise the profile of relationship based practice. It is not entirely surprising that emotions were seen to be compatible with social work given the nature of the work and the value base of the profession (SSSC, 2008). However, when placed in conjunction with the blurred profile of responses previously discussed, it gives rise to a more specific line of inquiry. If emotions are compatible, then in what ways are they experienced, used and recorded? These themes will be picked up throughout the results sections, but it is important at this point to view the above response as a validation of the central question of the thesis.

I had anticipated that there would be diverse views about the role of emotions and social work practice. I had hypothetically constructed 3

groupings that I expected to see emerge: those who saw emotions as central to their practice; those who had a mixed view; and those who did not view it is compatible. It will become evident that this was far too crude a picture and respondents did not fit neatly into these areas. One question that I constructed which was intended to explore the contested role and (crucially) the impact of emotions was the statement *"I practice in a manner which is objective and I can remove emotions from the process".* Table 22 presents the response of the cohort to this question:

19. "I practice in a manner that is objective and I can remove emotions from the process"			
Strongly agree:		8.7%	9
Agree:		35.0%	36
Slightly agree:		30.1%	31
Slightly disagree:		21.4%	22
Disagree:		2.9%	3
Strongly disagree:		1.9%	2

Table 22 – Responses to "I practice in a manner that is objective and I can remove emotions from the process"

The majority of respondents (73.8%) felt that they could to some extent remove emotions from their practice. Indeed, of those who disagreed 22 out of the 27 respondents only slightly disagreed. Taken in isolation this is a stark picture of the role of emotions. There appears to be an acceptance that on one hand emotions are compatible with being a social work professional, whilst a strong sense that they should be removed from the process of practice. In retrospect, I wonder if the wording of the question and the use of the word 'objective' was a powerful and persuasive factor when

respondents considered their choice. By this I mean that respondents would wish to be considered objective and the question implied a possible contradiction with the presence of emotions.

This direction of questioning can be counterbalanced by one further example from the survey, which approached the issue from a different angle and one which was less overt. I asked the cohort to consider whether *"being able to have and express empathy in my practice is important".* The reason I chose this question, is that within the construct of empathy, lies a strong and explicit emotional content and the links to emotional intelligence have been made within the review of literature. Simply put though, it involves the ability to 'tune in' to the emotional world of the service user *and* be able to express and communicate this back to the service user. In addition, as with the notion of objectivity, the question has a persuasive nature to it. Table 23 provides the response of the cohort to this question:

11. "Being able to have and express empathy in my practice is important"			
Strongly agree:		47.7%	51
Agree:		43.9%	47
Slightly agree:		7.5%	8
Slightly disagree:		0.0%	0
Disagree:		0.9%	1
Strongly disagree:		0.0%	0

Table 23 – Responses to "Being able to have and express empathy in my practice is important"

It is clear from Table 23 that there is an overwhelming view that empathy is central to social work practice. This is of course reflected in social work literature and training, which is why I noted the *persuasive* aspect of the question. The picture becomes very interesting when we cross tabulate this emphatic response with two questions which focus on the two way process of communicating and sharing the emotional content of the social work relationship. When cross tabulated with the statement *"service users share their emotions with me"* all those who responded agreed with the statement (12 respondents gave no answer). But when cross tabulated with the statement "*service users are able to recognise how I feel"* 54 out of the 104 that responded to the question disagreed. This raises a tension within the construct of empathy. It suggests that social workers are more comfortable with the notion of the social work relationship being one which facilitates openness from the service user. The picture becomes less clear and more guarded when it comes to openness and transparency of the social worker's emotions. I will return to this debate in the next section of this chapter which focuses on the service user/social worker relationship more closely, but the above account highlights another area of complexity within the results.

The survey data contained a series of free text response questions which allowed respondents to give further explanation about their views and perspectives. For the purposes of this section, I will present two contrasting viewpoints to further illustrate the complexity and individuality involved in the responses. Table 24 presents the responses of Rachel and Simone. I

have chosen their profiles as they present opposed viewpoints about the role of emotions and provided illuminating explanations. Rachel works within a criminal justice setting and Simone within a children and families setting. This is not relevant to this particular aspect of the discussion; rather it is their standpoint that drove the selection process.

Survey question	Rachel's response	Simone's response
I feel I can remove my emotions from my practice and decision making	Agree	Strongly Disagree
My emotions help me reach clear decisions	Disagree	Strongly agree
Emotions and feelings are compatible with being a social work professional	Disagree	Strongly agree
I share my emotions with service users	Disagree	Strongly agree
Being able to have and express empathy in my practice is important	Agree	Strongly agree
Service users share their emotions with me	Agree	Strongly agree
Service users recognise how I feel	Disagree	Strongly agree

Table 24 – Comparison of two viewpoints on role of emotions

Table 24 clearly shows that Rachel feels that emotions should be, and can be, removed from social work practice. She recognises that empathy is part of the social work approach, but is clear that her emotions are not shared (or used) within her practice. Simone on the other hand is clear about the centrality of emotions in practice and provides an emphatic belief in the two way process of emotional attunement and feels that she uses her emotions within the social work relationship and directly in decision making. Table 24 is a useful illustration of the competing standpoints which contribute to the

blurry picture emerging from the survey data. But when isolated from the wider cohort, their views appear much more vivid (as illustrated in table 24) and their comments flesh out their standpoints. When asked to give an example where emotions had a positive impact on their practice their responses are quite different.

Rachel – "*I am not aware that my personal emotions do impact on my practice as I believe I am able to remain objective whilst being able to show empathy*"

Simone – "*Anxiety is my way of knowing that there is something that is not quite right about a situation - this has naturally led me to be more curious perhaps asked more questions etc - generally there are further concerns that are only uncovered by asking the right questions*."

Rachel's answer raises some key issues relating to the place of emotions in relation to practice and empathy more specifically. She felt unable to give an example of the positive impact of emotions because she felt there simply was no impact due to her removal of emotions from the process. The use of the word 'personal' is an interesting one, in that it highlights something distinct and potentially detached from the professional sphere and this will be examined in the first section of the next chapter which is focused on the issue of professionalism. The other interesting part of the response is her view that empathy and removal of emotions are compatible.

Simone provides a response which contains an example of the active use (as opposed to removal) of emotions. She contends that her emotional response (anxiety in this case) impacted on the direction of her assessment and

provided motivation to ask particular questions. Simone goes on to provide a very vivid concept in a later question in the survey when she states:

"The practitioner needs to be able to apply a set of 'professional emotions' to these situations - being over emotional is not professional, practical or helpful, however neither is cutting yourself off from your feelings……There needs to be a balance - practitioners need to be educated about healthy exploration of their own emotions"

The idea that there is something that could be described as "professional emotions" is a fascinating idea and one which will be explored and discussed as key concept emerging from this thesis. For the purposes of this section, it is useful because it opens the door for considering emotions within the professional sphere and highlights the complexity of this. There are interesting links here to emotional regulation in terms of the use of the phrase 'over emotional'. This sense of regulation and proportionality may be a key factor in determining how respondents have articulated their standpoints. Rachel has made an explicit link to personal emotions and their undesirability within a professional paradigm and hence her standpoint flows from this conception of emotions.

This complex picture was a key theme that I drew from the survey data at the point of constructing the thematic approach to the interviews. For the purposes of this discussion about the complex place of emotions, I will highlight elements of the interview with Derek who worked within a children and families setting.

Richard – "*Tell me about your general view of the role of emotions in social work."*

Derek- "*Emotions are always central. I came into social work because I believe I can make a difference and understanding people. Emotions need to be controlled and used appropriately….need to be emotional and professional…..I see them as separate and linked…..being in touch with your emotions and having a connection with a client is important and you build a rapport because you are the bridge to services…..obviously you have to be professional…..but its all one package if you like and balance your roles and responsibilities."*

This response contains a wealth of ideas in relation to the role of emotions in social work practice. It attracted multiple coding (empathy, positive emotions, managing emotions, professionalism and sharing emotions) and reflects a standpoint which values and integrates emotions within the role of the social work professional. It is worth noting (to be returned to in the next chapter) that when the word 'professional' is used, it is linked to a cautionary tone about emotional management. This is a recurring theme, and one which 'allows' respondents to explore emotions in relation to practice more comfortably. What is central to Derek's approach is that he recognises the role and use of emotions within the user/worker relationship. The use of the word 'balance' in relation to roles and responsibilities is important here, as I believe that the difficulty in *articulating* where this balance lies impacts on the responses of the wider cohort and then in turn leads to the apparently contradictory nature of some responses. It is worth noting at this point that the analysis and coding of the interview transcripts highlighted a much stronger view that emotions *had* a place within social work practice, despite the selected cohort representing the broad spectrum of views within the

questionnaire. This will become evident throughout the analysis of the results, and suggests that the interviews allowed respondents greater opportunity to reflect and articulate their views about emotions, and in turn this allowed them to locate a 'space' for emotions which the survey had not allowed them.

6.3 - Emotions and work with service users

In this section I will explore more closely the data in relation to the use of empathy and more generally engagement within the social work relationship. I will consider how this sits in relation to responses to questions within the survey concerned with the sharing, managing and expression of emotion within practice. I purposefully constructed questions around the practical/emotional elements of direct practice with service users in order to shed light on the complexities within it. This was further bolstered by free-text type questions which asked respondents to discuss examples from their own practice where emotions had an impact negatively or positively. Inevitably these responses encourage respondents to reflect upon their experiences and in turn add depth to their initial responses. I will then go on to pull out themes that emerged relating to the service user relationship that arose through this discussion. These will include the *impact* of emotions on the focus, intensity and experience of direct practice with service users. I was able to highlight these issues prior to the interview phase and as such will be able to provide greater depth relating directly to the issues I identified

from the initial analysis of the survey data through examples from the interview transcriptions.

In table 23, I identified the overwhelming response to the question regarding whether *"being able to have and express empathy in my practice is important",* which showed that 99.1% of respondents agreed with this statement. I noted that when cross tabulated with the statement *"service users share their emotions with me"* all those who responded agreed with the statement (12 respondents gave no answer). But when cross tabulated with the statement *"service users are able to recognise how I feel"* 54 out of the 104 that responded to the question disagreed. These responses laid the foundations for my interest in the nature of where social workers felt emotions sat within direct practice with service users. It is important at this stage to clarify that I am conscious that empathy within a social work relationship is not about an unguarded expression/connection at an emotional level and that professional roles and boundaries *are* at play. However, if we accept that empathy does require a degree of connection, genuineness and communication then there is an area where empathy becomes a two-way process between worker and user. Perhaps the following table indicates that respondents felt that emotional intelligence and the management and regulation of emotions was a key factor.

14. "I am able to control my emotions during contacts with service users"			
Strongly agree:		30.2%	32
Agree:		64.2%	68
Slightly agree:		3.8%	4
Slightly disagree:		1.9%	2
Disagree:		0.0%	0
Strongly disagree:		0.0%	0

Table 25 – Responses to "I am able to control my emotions during contacts with service users"

Table 25 has strong links with emotional intelligence although in isolation the above responses may indicate a broad range of interpretations about what emotional control means within the social work relationship. Respondents were asked to give an example of a time when their emotions had a negative or positive impact on their practice. The use of the word 'impact' was cogent as I was particularly keen to elicit examples that moved beyond recognition of the presence of emotions to one where the role and effect was considered. It is worth noting that a key finding from this area of questioning was that many of respondents did not answer the question as was intended. By this I mean that they did not consider the impact of emotions on *their practice*, but considered the emotions that their practice had given rise to within themselves only. The following quotes help to illustrate this:

Emilie (Social worker, children and families) – *"sadness because the parents had worked so hard for a year and achieved yet once the children returned home the father went back to old ways within 3 months".*

Ella (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"Satisfaction - a positive session with a client where we overcame some of his inhibitions which was rewarding."*

Both these respondents answered in terms of the emotional impact that the practice had on them. This is clearly a key aspect of the emotional context of practice and reflects the emotional awareness aspects of emotional intelligence. However, it falls short of making a link between emotions (felt or observed) and a role or impact within the practice itself. These types of response may well signal the starting point of a reflective process which could in turn feed into future actions, but as it stands they appear to keep emotions within a private and separate sphere from the direct practice. The following quote from Grace may provide a clearer example of how this type of response could begin to impact on practice.

Grace (Social worker, children and families) – *"I had a mother who was verbally abusive and physically intimidating towards me, threatening to "get me." This caused me a lot of fear in regard to my own personal safety and anxiety regarding my assessment. "What if I've assessed the wrong thing." I was very anxious about meeting her and her partner again and wanted to constantly put it off, which would not have been in their children's best interests".*

It is clear that Grace has taken the fear she has felt when engaging with this family, and moved it beyond simply recognising the emotions. Grace has been able then to consider the impact that this emotion may have on her ability to be clear in her assessment and also the potential it could have in triggering avoidance of the family. She is right to contextualise this within the notion of the child's best interests and will hopefully be a key source of information for her when working with the family. Grace stated she would not write about these emotions in reports, despite the significance to her practice, but did identify supervision as a key forum for exploring such

issues. I will discuss forums such as supervision in much more detail in the next chapter.

A key theme emerging from the respondents who did forge links between their emotions and their practice was that of motivation and impetus. By this I mean that emotions triggered and inspired a particular response to a situation. The following quotes illustrate this school of thought:

Joan (Social worker, children and families) – *"My anxiety during a home visit had a positive impact as it highlighted personal risk and allowed me to reflect on future planning for subsequent visits to this client".*

Tina (Care manager, adult care) - *"frustration led to increased determination and commitment to finding services to meet a service users needs."*

Tricia (Care manager, older people) - *"Dissatisfaction -I was not happy with the lack of progress for a client in getting them settled in a long term placement. I reviewed the future plan for a service user and took active steps to make it happen, made it a focus of my work for a week."*

It is clear from Joan's example that the anxiety that she felt during a home visit had a direct contribution to her assessment of risk to herself and her sense of the service user's behaviour and profile. It is worth making a link to the next section and the removal of emotions from report writing. Joan stated she would not write about emotions in reports or casenotes. This provides us with a strong example of where emotions informed an assessment and provided direction for the approach taken, yet may well have not been recorded in writing as part of the process. Tina provides a useful example of how emotional responses can alter the intensity and commitment

to a piece of work. This may well have a very significant impact on the outcomes for the service user, yet Tina strongly disagreed that she would write about emotions in reports. The idea that emotions can affect the motivation of social workers gave rise to the potential for creating a two-tiered service where emotions can affect the efforts made by workers. Perhaps Tricia's response highlights the extent to which emotions can impact on motivation levels and it is worth considering the impact that focusing a week on one case will have on other parts of her caseload. I will pick up on this with a vivid example from the interview phase later in this section, but again the removal of emotions from the recording and presentation of practice does not mean that the impact is removed. Indeed, it could be argued that the likelihood of reflection and awareness is compromised by removing this stream of information from written recording.

The previous examples in this section have highlighted the presence of emotions and the impact it can have on the focus and direction of practice. The following examples highlight the use of emotions within the social work relationship as a *tool* for engagement and intervention.

Catriona (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"A client who had not been attending improved his attendance after we had a discussion of the problems. As a result I could put a positive progress report into the Court. He was relieved and happy and I was likewise happy which lightened the mood of our last session and the service user was more relaxed and more open."*

Susan (Residential social worker, young people) - *"Feeling happy 'rubs off' on the young people, can help bring them out of their low mood."*

Maureen (Mental health officer) – *"Client thought my happiness was related to a negative experience of theirs."*

Catriona's example is a powerful one as it highlights the two-way aspect of the emotional context of social work relationships. Both parties in a social worker/service user relationship are feeling emotions and tuning into those of the other to one extent of another. In Catriona's example she highlights both her own feelings of satisfaction and those of the service user. She takes this a stage further by then identifying how this can be *used* within their relationship to create a positive opportunity for openness. It is clear here that there is a sharing of feelings (possibly easier due to the positive nature of them) between worker and service user.

Susan explicitly speaks of emotion as being an element of practice skills. In the same way that a considered use of a particular type of question may have a positive impact, Susan notes that use of a positive mood can directly impact on the mood and well being of service users. This is a powerful claim for the active use of emotions within practice. I chose the quote from Maureen as a cautionary balance to that of Susan. Maureen draws attention for the need for there to be a congruency between the emotions shared and expressed, and the content of the practice. This again brings us back to the notion of emotional regulation and management. This seems much more relevant when it is accepted that emotions have a role and function within a social work relationship and the strategic and purposeful use of them can be considered and explored. This is another key area of interest emerging from

the data. Before I move on to the interview data, the following quote from John encapsulates many of the elements emerging in the above discussion.

John (Social worker, learning disabilities) – *"I find emotions are of most use in empathising with service users. Often people within social services find themselves in situations that they cannot see a way out of and the strain this places on them is evident. I feel that appropriate use of emotional intelligence in recognising this helps build a relationship with the service user. I do not allow my feelings to dominate interactions (though they are not entirely absent) with service users as I view my role as a professional one. This distance is required, particularly when difficult and sometimes conflicting decisions have to be made. It also serves to ensure that the service user knows throughout any interaction where they stand*."

John presents empathy within the context of professional roles and boundaries. He notes the importance of tuning into the feelings of service users and allowing space for these to be communicated within the relationship. He recognises that emotional regulation allows for clarity about boundaries which aides the relationship when there is conflict. It is heartening that he balances this with a commitment to seeking transparency throughout the relationship to achieve a trusting and genuine relationship.

As noted above, I was able to identify the issues explored above prior to the interviews, and as such was able to construct questions around these topics to explore them more deeply. The interviews allowed respondents to reflect on their survey answers and begin to develop their own perspectives and understandings further. This was particularly evident around discussions about the extent to which emotions impact on the motivation and impetus within a piece of practice. The following quote from Olivia was given within

the first of the series of interviews and as such provided a foundational example for subsequent interviews. This reflects the iterative development of the focus of interviews within and *between* interviews.

Richard – *"Tell me about a time where your emotional response to a service user impacted on the work you undertook"*

Olivia (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"I was working with a 16 year old lad a few months ago and he completely reminded me of my brother….in a good way. He looked similar and amazingly similar mannerisms and stuff. I just found myself thinking more about him in the evenings and weekends. I would worry more and I definitely went the extra mile for him as I felt I could tune in easier and I liked him".*

Richard – *"If you felt a negative association with a service user would this have a different impact?"*

Olivia – "*Yes probably – though it is not what you would want to think about yourself. Sometimes just do the basics"*

This discussion with Olivia was a pivotal moment for me as it gave a vivid example of how emotional responses can allow social workers to make connections within their own private spheres and memories, which in turn can aide or hinder attunement. This echoes familiar debates about the need for reflection and awareness of personal responses and values, which will feed into discussions later in this thesis. It also signposts the next chapter of the results which looks at organisational structures, processes and cultures which may support or hinder social workers when they deal with these issues. Olivia hints at the uncomfortable nature of admitting to these emotional triggers to motivation and echoes previous discussions about

professionalism and boundaries. As I noted earlier, this discussion formed the basis of further exploration of this issue in subsequent interviews. The following quotes give further depth to this issue.

Pete (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"Is there a two tier service if you go the extra mile?….I recognise the practice but not in myself…..I have had the debate with a colleague…there are some I would maybe give the benefit of the doubt to….folk you like better…they are people in life that you get on better with".*

Megan (Social worker, children and families) – *"I think there will always be individuals you have an affinity with and that is the danger of an emotional link with someone and you need supervision to reflect on this…..it is about the professionalism stepping in…..I need everyone else treated fairly…..I struggle with those service users who shout the loudest…often the most demanding and threatening get more time proportionally so it cuts both ways".*

Pete's response is illuminating as it highlights the tension between recognising the issue of the impact of emotions broadly and recognising it within your own practice. Pete highlights the informal sphere of peer discussions as being an area to explore this (this will be returned to in much more detail in the next section) and knows that others have spoken of this source of motivation. Despite initially distancing himself from it, he goes on to open the door to this phenomenon. There is potentially a lot within the apparently casual phrase "give the benefit of the doubt to" as it suggests a pivotal influence on an assessment or agreed course of action. If we go back to Olivia's views, it may also hint at outcomes for those who do *not* get the benefit of the doubt.

Megan provides a useful signpost to the balance that needs to be struck between emotional responses to service users and the professional role. This returns us to that blurry area where engagement and attunement is balanced by a need for regulation of emotions and a clear sense of role. This is a key area for discussion emerging within this thesis, and the comments about supervision and individual/organisational responses to the differing visibility service users have depending on the service users' situation or approach are crucial.

The discussion above has a focus on the impact of subtle emotional responses to service users by social workers. Another key focus of the interviews was to explore the place of emotions within the social work relationship in terms of empathy, sharing of emotions (bi-directional) and using emotions within interactions. The following quotation from Pete comes in response to a general question about the extent to which he shares and uses emotions within interactions with service users.

Pete (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"An example of a time when emotions impacted on my approach was when dealing with a sexual offender. I react more strongly with folk who deny offences as it makes inroads harder…I used to feel very stressed out about it and to know what to do…also when folk don't communicate with you. I have once lost my temper and I used threats to breach them…..This is a misuse of powers and would never do that now…I now roll with resistance with motivational interviewing…try to be empathetic because there are reasons why people are denying things also be holistic and look at issues not to do with offence….make link with risk and need…..I often practice what I teach when working with client. For example, I take myself out of the moment….allow awkward silences….rather than plug the silence and have time to think instead."*

This is a powerful example, as it was rare that interview respondents gave examples which explored 'negative' emotions such as anger and irritation. Pete shows how such reactions can lead to issues of power and control. It is worth noting that his example reflects a use of professional role and responsibilities in relation to his emotions (previously highlighted as a positive aspect of practice), but shows that this can be undertaken in a manner which is coercive and potentially oppressive. It was heartening that Pete's response to such experiences has been to reflect upon what this means for service users and places them within a wider context to help him manage the emotional responses to the presenting behaviours. This holistic approach is also underpinned by drawing upon knowledge relating to the individual and societal context of the service user and represents the integration of emotion with knowledge bases. This clearly links well to the emotional knowledge elements of emotional intelligence and his final example about allowing silences begins to open the door to the role of *modelling* emotional responses as a tool within a social work relationship.

The following quote from Elizabeth pushes this discussion further in terms of sharing and using emotions. I had raised the issue that if social workers do not share their emotions with service users, then it could be argued that empathy is something which is 'acted' rather than genuinely felt or communicated. My interest in this was sparked by Simone's aforementioned comment about "professional emotions". This suggested to me that there

may scope for a 'presentational' approach to practice which fell short of the genuineness and transparency desired of social workers by service users.

Elizabeth (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"I often share my feelings with service users but not actually act on them in the sense of being angry with them…I tell them I am angry though…the professional bit is acknowledging emotions but not transferring them. Empathy is very important…central to building a relationship in difficult situations…..Can social workers act empathic?-I don't believe that people can separate emotions and also acting empathic will be found out….service users pick up on it very quickly…I have faked it at times and have been picked up on."*

Elizabeth provides a clear example about how felt emotion can be articulated and communicated verbally within a social work relationship to allow for clarity and transparency. This usefully sidesteps the dilemma that feeling an emotion must in turn equal acting directly upon it in an interaction; rather there is space to communicate the felt emotion verbally. This again highlights the role of emotional intelligence in terms of identification, regulation and expressing emotions. Elizabeth was very clear that "acting" empathetic is not a useful approach and highlights the two-way nature of an empathic relationship where both parties' emotional antennae are at work. This discussion is a key theme emerging in this thesis in terms of the balance of sharing and managing emotions and where this stands in relation to transparency and genuineness.

The following case example from Abigail was the most powerful example of the bi-directional nature of the emotional aspects of a social work relationship. It underlines the need for genuineness and also provides a

stark reminder that it is too one-dimensional to debate the place of emotions within social work without considering all parties in the relationship as dynamic and contributory.

Richard – *"Tell me about the role emotions have within your practice."*

Abigail (Social worker, family support centre) – *"I work with children and parents and babies….part of working with babies is to have emotion and emotions and communication and receiving this from babies is so important in child development…….must recognise feelings of sadness, sorrow etc in parents and children….we need to role model how to express, feel and control emotions."*

Richard – *"Can you give me any examples?"*

Abigail – *"I run a parenting group and a father was referred to my team who was known to be uncooperative with social work. I was worried about his impact on the group and he never spoke for the first few weeks and always left first. I noticed on week 5 he really warmed up and helped put away chairs at the end. I asked him why this change had occurred during the evaluation, and he said that he knew I was genuine when he saw me arch my back when I laughed at a service user's joke – he knew I could be trusted."*

Taking the first part of Abigail's answer first, it is clear that she can identify the need to model emotional responses and give implicit permissions to parents to recognise and understand how they feel in relation to their children. On a basic level she highlights the readily accepted practice of demonstrably emotionally communicating with young children as being central to good practice and the foundation blocks of human interactions. This provides further depth to the idea that emotions can be an active tool within practice. The case example of the father whose analysis of the

emotional cues from Abigail was so finely tuned that something as apparently subtle as the arching of her back when laughing was important is a powerful reminder that the emotional reading of a relationship is happening on both sides. It is a cautionary note if we consider the previously discussed use of 'professional emotions' and/or not sharing emotions. It suggests that the quality of relationships with service users can rely on the transparency and congruency of emotions. It is also very interesting if we make a link back to the removal of the emotional content of practice from written recordings, as it is possible to imagine that the positive outcome for the father in this intervention could simply be linked to the effective use of groupwork, but in reality the success may have its roots in the subtle interpersonal sphere of the practice. This will be a key issue to be taken forward later in this thesis.

My analysis of Abigail's example hints at the relationship between emotions and wider knowledge and approaches to practice. The following comments from Simone take this further and pulls together many of the strands of the preceding discussion in this section.

Simone (Social worker, children and families) – *"There is no social worker in the land that can tell me that they haven't had their heart thumping as they approach certain houses and if that is the case how do service users home feel? How can we lose that?"*

Simone's survey profile is one which embraces the use and role of emotion within social work practice. She provides a dynamic and reflexive example of the emotional experience of both the worker and the service user and the

need consider this when establishing relationships. The example of fear is not uncommon within social work practice, but requires a worker to be able to manage this and be able to establish an environment for both worker and service user to feel safe. This will likely involve empathy and clarity of role, but also links to the next chapter of the results, which seeks to explore the impact of organisational processes and cultures in relation to the emotional aspects of practice.

6.4 - Emotions and writing in social work

The preceding sections have highlighted the broad range of views relating to the presence and use of emotions in social work practice. A key finding emerging from the survey data related to the extent to which the emotional context of practice is presented, explored and recorded in written form. This was an area that I had anticipated would be of interest due to my experience of writing reports and casenotes as a social worker and I purposefully constructed questions which addressed this issue directly. Tables 26 and 27 provide the responses to the two key questions relating to whether social workers write about their emotions in reports and/or casenotes.

8. "I write about my emotions in formal reports"			
Strongly agree:		1.0%	1
Agree:		1.9%	2
Slightly agree:		6.7%	7
Slightly disagree:		9.5%	10
Disagree:		45.7%	48
Strongly disagree:		35.2%	37

Table 26 – Responses to "I write about my emotions in formal reports"

9. "I write about my emotions in case notes"			
Strongly agree:		0.9%	1
Agree:		1.9%	2
Slightly agree:		11.1%	12
Slightly disagree:		14.8%	16
Disagree:		38.9%	42
Strongly disagree:		32.4%	35

Table 27 – Reponses to "I write about emotions in case notes"

Both tables illustrate a stark response to the recording of the emotional context of practice within reports. 90.4% of respondents said that they would not write about emotions within formal reports and 86.1% said they would not write about emotions in casenotes. This view is underlined by noting the strength of response in the disagree/strongly disagree categories. This response profile provides a clear picture of an area where emotions are removed from a particular process of practice. It is worth noting at this early stage in this section that the above tables suggest a removal of emotions from the *presentation and recording* of practice in written form rather than necessarily an actual fundamental removal of them from the practice itself.

This sense that there is a presentational removal of emotions will be explored and examined further in this section.

It is useful to undertake cross tabulations with questions focused on the role of emotions more broadly to see how this sits within the wider picture. Table 28 provides a cross tabulation of the question regarding emotions and formal reports and the question about the compatibility of emotions and the social work profession.

6. "Emotions and feelings are compatible with being a social work professional"								
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Slightly agree**	**Slightly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**No Answer**	**Totals**
Strongly agree	1	0	0	0	12	6	1	**20**
Agree	0	2	6	8	25	16	1	**58**
Slightly agree	0	0	1	2	5	11	1	**20**
Slightly disagree	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	**6**
Disagree	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	**3**
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	**1**
No Answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	**4**
Totals	**1**	**2**	**7**	**10**	**48**	**37**	**7**	**112**

Table 28 – Cross tabulation of questions 6 and 8
*Results are cross tabulated by question 8. "I write about my emotions in formal reports"
*Results for the question 6 are aggregated on the vertical axis.

It is interesting to note that only 10 of the 95 respondents who felt that they did *not* write about emotions in formal reports felt that emotions and feelings

were incompatible with being a social work professional. This is a powerful message as it underlines the idea that the presence and compatibility of emotions is generally accepted, but that it does not have a place in the formal articulation and presentation of the practice process. This raises issues about transparency and genuineness in the written articulation of practice and this formed a key theme for the interview phase which I will come to later in this section.

Table 29 provides a useful comparison as it places the issue for writing about emotions directly against the assessment aspect of social work practice.

21. "My feelings contribute to my assessments"								
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Slightly agree**	**Slightly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	***No Answer***	**Totals**
Strongly agree	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Agree	1	1	2	2	7	4	2	**19**
Slightly agree	0	1	4	6	22	7	0	**40**
Slightly disagree	0	0	1	2	6	9	1	**19**
Disagree	0	0	0	0	13	11	0	**24**
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	**6**
No Answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	**4**
Totals	**1**	**2**	**7**	**10**	**48**	**37**	**7**	**112**

Table 29 – Cross tabulation of questions 21 and 8

*Results are cross tabulated by question 8. "I write about my emotions in formal reports"

*Results for the question 21 are aggregated on the vertical axis.

Unsurprisingly, the 9 out of the 10 respondents who stated that they would write about emotions in reports also felt that their emotions contributed to assessments. However, 48 out of the 95 respondents who stated that they did not write about emotions in reports stated that emotions *did* contribute to assessments. This provides a clear signal that in some cases the role and impact of emotions within the assessment process (and in turn links to interventions and outcomes for service users) are simply not recorded in writing and that an edited version of the process is presented.

The qualitative responses within the survey data shed more light on this issue, although it is worth noting that there were very few qualitative responses which highlighted the written aspects of practice. Instead most responses focused on the direct practice with service users.

The following quotes are from respondents who did not agree that they would write about emotions in formal reports. It is worth noting that they all agreed that emotions are compatible with being a social work professional. These comments are in response to the question *"Please describe your view of the role of emotions within your practice and any issues that you feel are important."*

Kirsty (Social worker, child protection) – *"I think emotions are much better discussed than written when they may be subject to different interpretation"*

Grace (Social worker, children and families) – *"I do accept that I have emotions in regard to my work, but either putting them into my written*

assessments or explaining them to clients/parents, I feel can muddle the situation."

Elise (Social worker, criminal justice) – "*I believe emotions are important and also situated judgment as I believe this plays a part in decision making but not the only thing, its a mixture of most informed information and personal emotions 'gut feelings'."*

Kirsty highlights the familiar debate about the potentially ill-focused and blurry nature of emotions in the context of decision making. It is interesting that Kirsty does not view emotions as difficult to explain or articulate in verbal communication, rather it is the written form that the problems arise for her. Indeed, she points to the interpretation of others rather than *her* articulation as a key obstacle. This suggests that there are external judgements which could undermine the validity and veracity of the decisions made. This links with the debate about professionalism and the place that emotions may have in the hierarchy of knowledge and tools brought to bear in social work. Kirsty appears to suggest that emotions are more vulnerable to misinterpretation or judgement. Grace further highlights the notion that emotions can 'muddle' the clarity around written aspects of practice. Indeed, she suggests that it is also too difficult to share and explain emotional aspects of her practice with service users. This reinforces my aforementioned concern about transparency and genuineness. The two strands taken together create space for emotions to exist within practice and have an active role within it, but can be removed from the written and oral articulation the practice for reasons of clarity and validity. Elise does not resolve this issue but again finds space for a strong emotional presence

within her work whilst not recording this in written reports. I would argue that it reflects an emphasis on seeking a technical/rational articulation of practice even in instances where emotions have a significant presence and role. This is a key issue emerging from the data of this thesis and will be explored further in later chapters.

The following quote from Simone may shed some light on the context in which the previous quotes can be viewed.

Simone (Social worker, children and families) - "*There is a very unhealthy emotional culture on the front line. There needs to be a balance - practitioners need to be educated about healthy exploration of their own emotions*. "

I will discuss the impact of organisational culture in a later section in greater depth, but it is pertinent to highlight the wider context in which workers may feel it necessary or desirable to remove the emotional content of their practice from their writing, and also Simone highlights the potential skill deficit in relation to articulating and exploring emotions.

As indicated earlier in this section, the theme about the place of emotions in the written aspects of practice emerged as a significant area of interest from the survey data. This allowed me to build this into the interview construction and the data emerging from the interviews adds to the depth and clarity about this complex issue. The following quotes were in response to me identifying the issue about written aspects of practice that had emerged from

the surveys and asking generally what they thought about it. This was intended to allow them an opportunity to consider their own view but also to reflect and critically examine what the broader issue might mean to them.

Elizabeth (Social worker, criminal justice) – "*There is fear that we will be seen as airy fairy and not on a par with other professionals and this takes us away from feelings.*"

Robert (Manager, adult care) – "*I am quite mindful of the criticism of inspectors of how decisions are arrived at……I guess the emotional stuff is not recorded.*"

Elizabeth was very clear that the decision to remove or minimise the emotional aspects of practice from written recordings was inextricably linked the notion of having credibility as a professional. This again places a technical/rational construction of professionalism as the desirable one and the clearly suggests that within a multi-disciplinary context emotions may be seen as weak and lacking a comparable robustness with other professions. This is at odds with the notion of relationship based perspectives which would seek to view the emotional aspects of practice as being one of the key indicators of social work's profile among the wider professional landscape. Robert pushes this initial point further by suggesting that there are regulatory functions which are at odds with the recording of the emotional aspects of practice. This again may reflect managerialist approaches to practice which push workers towards the presentational removal of emotions in order to meet required indicators of good practice. This highlights a possible tension between the procedures that underpin professional practice

and how these facilitate or inhibit the achievement of particular professional constructs. This is a key debate emerging for the data and will be returned to in later discussions.

The following quotes move the exploration of the written aspects of practice into an increasingly practical sphere and give potential signals for the role of emotion within it.

Simone (Social worker, children and families) – "*I think outcomes are mainly recorded. I might say someone was intimidating but not that I felt intimidated if you know what I mean."*

Derek (Social worker, children and families) - "*The greatest resource you have is yourself and creativeness and be able to form relationships with service users and resources and other services always trying to get the best the result and be positive…your emotion and you do have a gut feeling and maybe do a police check to check it out and that is professional but that emotion is not included in reports and casenotes."*

Olivia (Social worker, criminal justice) - "*I think you need to treat everyone the same and not be too emotionally led…writing reports helps check that you have balanced your assessment and not just doing what you feel."*

Simone's response highlights a key issue when asking respondents to consider the issue of writing about emotions. She gives an example of how she might record an *emotional incident* in a report. By this I mean that she focussed on the recording of how she explicitly felt on a given occasion. This is *part* of the picture of recording emotions and she spoke further about the impact that emotions have on her actions (for example asking further questions). When considering the writing of this, she begins to distance

herself in terms of the impact of the emotions. This in turn may cloud (rather than clarify) the process and rationale for her actions as the drivers and motivations are removed. Derek provides a persuasive case for the role of emotions within his practice and gives a lucid example of how a gut feeling may move you to undertake an action such as a 'police check', but that the driver (gut feeling in this case) is not seen as appropriate for recording. This may then lead to an unclear and incomplete account of how and why particular decisions were made. Both their accounts reflect clearly the value they place on the emotional context of their practice. What they appear to struggle with is the *permission* to record or explore this in writing. Olivia's response may provide a counter argument here in that she views the process of writing about practice as an opportunity to check that emotions have not influenced the process. It would seem that Olivia is suggesting a retrospective process which does not seek to change the impact of the emotions during the direct practice, but rather seeks to remove them from the presentation and justification of actions. This editing of the process of practice and decision making may lead to the removal of key information to aid communication between professionals and the clarity of subsequent decision making. I will pick up on this key theme in later discussions about the place of emotions in practice.

Chapter 7 - Results – Emotions: professionalism and organisational context.

7.1 – Introduction

In this chapter I will pick up on the emerging themes in the previous chapter regarding the place that emotions may have within the notion of 'being professional'. I will also shed light on the organisational context in which social workers operate and how this supports or compromises the role of emotions in social work practice.

7.2 - Professionalism and emotions in social work

A key theme emerging from all parts of the data was the implicit and explicit references to 'being professional' when discussing the role of emotions in social work practice. Phrases containing reference to the word "professional" appeared regularly despite only one Likert scaled question making mention of the term. In this section I will examine the emergence of this issue within the data and consider what messages it holds regarding the place of emotions within a range of constructs of what it is to be a social work professional.

Table 21 in the preceding chapter noted that 90.7% of respondents agreed to some extent with the direct statement "emotions and feelings are compatible

with being a social work profession". This appears at first glance to give a ringing endorsement of the role of emotions, but on closer inspection the nature of this role is contested. What will become evident, is that the act of thinking about the role of emotions and practice is often undertaken through the lens of 'being a social work *professional*'. In the preceding section, I noted the complex picture emerging regarding the role of emotions. Using that discussion as a starting point, I will now focus on the qualitative data within the survey questionnaire to allow more detail, reflection and explanation to be considered.

The final question of the survey questionnaire invited responses to the following question: *"Please describe your view of the role of emotions within your practice and any issues that you feel are important".* 72 respondents answered the question, and of these 27 answered the question by making reference to being professional. It is useful at this stage to be explicit and transparent about what components I viewed as contributing to the coding of 'professionalism'. To be marked against that code (bearing in mind responses could attract more than one code) the following aspects could be present:

- Use of the word professional
- Explicit reference to 'social work' as a distinct activity
- Balance of personal and professional emotions

- Emotions – removal, regulation, tension, objectivity and active use of emotions. (in relation to the first two bullet points)

John (Social worker, adult care) responded to the above question in the following manner:

"I do not allow my feelings to dominate interactions (though they are not entirely absent) with service users as I view my role as a professional one. This distance is required, particularly when difficult and sometimes conflicting decisions have to be made. It also serves to ensure that the service user knows throughout any interaction where they stand."

John worked with adults with learning disabilities and his overall survey profile was one of a mixed view of the role of emotions. He *did* view emotions as being compatible with the social work profession yet also felt able to remove them at different stages within his practice. He concedes that emotions are likely to be present within his practice, but makes an explicit division between their presence and the achievement of what could be viewed as professional practice. This separation is linked explicitly to the role of being a 'decision maker' and echoes debates about the contested relationship between emotions and rational thoughts. It would appear that John is contending that emotions would inhibit decision making and it is the rationality of the decision making that achieves the professional status of the activity. There is also sense that regulating emotions will place (professional) boundaries around the service user/worker relationship which in turn prepares the ground for making decisions' that may conflict with the views of the service user. This provides an interesting link between

relationship-based approaches and the balance with perceived professional boundaries.

The notion that social work professionalism requires, and possibly relies upon a detachment from emotions is echoed in the following examples:

Margaret (Team leader, adult services) - "*I feel it is important to remain objective and to a degree learn to detach yourself and recognise that emotions are healthy and normal but that they mustn't cloud judgment and professional responses"*

Janet (Social worker, children and families) – "*I think you have to be able to display empathy within practice but your own emotions should not be apparent within practice as this could compromise your professionalism."*

Margaret makes an explicit link between the recurrent issue of objectivity and the concept of "*professional response*s" (my emphasis). This phrase is very powerful in that it separates what she describes as 'healthy and normal' emotions with something that could be deemed professional. I will return later to the tension between empathy and removal of emotions, but in Janet's terms, this is not a tension but a professional necessity. The idea that one's professionalism can be compromised by the role of emotions seems to suggest that there is a construct of the profession that is technically rational in nature. The aforementioned point by Margaret about separating "healthy and normal" emotional reactions from the activity of being a social work professional, links with a further theme about 'being human' and being a social worker. It may be surprising to note in the following quotes that even 'being human' is not a comfortable fit with certain constructs of a social

work professional, but begins to open the door for considering emotions within the sphere of professionalism.

Hilda (Senior officer) – *"Emotions are a fundamental part of being human but I need to be aware of where and when showing emotions will be acceptable and where not."*

Jane (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"I still believe that I can demonstrate boundaries well but I am a human being at the end of the day, I get angry, I get upset and I feel happiness when my client does well for themselves. This is who I am and why I came in to social work."*

Fiona (Care manager, learning disabilities) – *"Whilst I would not allow my feelings to rule my practice, I do not wish to be the type of social worker where I am 'un-feeling', and want to be a caring professional. I do not want to feel detached from the service users I am working with, and believe that empathy and a caring attitude can go a long way in this job."*

Hilda continued the theme about the uneasy relationship between emotions and practice. The reduction of the debate down to simply 'being human' is a powerful one and allows the discussion to move into the idea that there is an element of *impression management* at play here (Goffman, 1972). Simply put, Hilda hints at the notion that there is a need for considering context, role and function when displaying or removing emotions. The crucial aspect of this is that it becomes a *presentational* issue perhaps rather than an internal process that removes emotion. This issue about professional presentation and recording of emotions will be looked at closely in the next section and forms a key aspect of the findings of the thesis. Jane presents a powerful list of the emotions that she links to 'being human'. She recognises the boundaries within the worker/service user relationship which echo Hilda's

consideration of context, but also pushes the compatibility further by identifying emotional connections with service users as a motivating factor to enter the profession. Fiona stakes a claim for emotions and feelings having a central role in establishing the worker/service user relationship, and uses the familiar but significant phrase "caring professions". By adding this pre-fix to the word profession, the debate about the role of emotions becomes more manageable and less incongruous. I will develop a construct of professionalism later in the thesis discussion, but it is important to highlight the power of such a pre-fix, and perhaps 'human' would be a very relevant pre-fix to consider.

The issue of professionalism and emotions formed a key focus within the interview phase of the inquiry. I raised the issue explicitly within the interviews letting interviewees know that the complex link between emotions and social work as a profession had emerged from the survey data. I sought to explore this more deeply by directly asking them to consider the issue about professionalism and what it meant to them.

Jimmy (Social worker, adoption/fostering) – *"If we don't have emotions we can't empathise with our service users also you pick up with your emotional antennae and pick up on emotions and then put those into context and that is when the professionalism comes in….unless you can read emotions, you may not be able to pick up on the professionalism and where your service users are coming from……you can't be theory based only….what makes social work unique as profession is that it is not cut and dry and there are so many grey areas and the grey area is helpful."*

Jimmy's view about the role of emotions highlights many key concepts and issues. Firstly, Jimmy notes that the information that workers can draw from their emotional responses can be a core element of the profession in terms of relationship building and assessment processes. Indeed, his description provides a persuasive mapping of the construct of emotional intelligence onto the social work profession. He accepts the role of emotion by highlighting the need for attunement, regulation, reflection and use of emotions in practice. The final comment about "grey areas" which is rather reminiscent of the "swampy lowlands" described by Schon (1983) about reflective practice provides a space for emotions to not only exist on the periphery of the profession but to have an active role in the identity and activities of workers.

Hazel (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"Professional face is useful when with a challenging client but when I am more relaxed I can be myself more…this is more about me to control my emotions and emotion like this would be fear and disgust and frustration."*

Simone (Social worker, children and families) – *"I may have an aggressive father in the corner, I use my knowledge of aggressive behaviour, attachment theory etc alongside my emotions to make sense…..you need to try to work why you are feeling scared of the man in the corner….that is what makes social workers different because of the interaction between the emotions and the knowledge……..as social workers coming into the lives of service users why do we have social workers rather than a vending machine that dishes out services…the thing is we build relationships and we use our emotions."*

Hazel uses the very interesting phrase "professional face". This echoes the preceding discussion about the presentational aspect of professionalism. She vividly describes the need for emotional management and regulation,

especially in circumstances where the explicit expression of the emotions could have a detrimental impact on her practice and the relationship with the service user. This provides a useful signpost to the types of emotions which need to be controlled to aide practice rather than a blanket removal of emotions and self. Simone provides a vivid and familiar example from practice in which there is a combination of emotional responses, gut feelings, knowledge and role all at play within a moment of time. Simone recognises that her emotional responses not only need to be managed, but are a stream of information with which to direct her practice and integrate with her wider knowledge. This creates a vision of the profession which recognises and *uses* emotions within it. I have purposefully chosen to emphasise the word 'uses' as it moves emotions into an area where they have a direct affective role rather than something which is felt and managed. Simone concludes with a reference to the *relationship* aspect of the profession and that this is central to the identity of the profession rather than a 'vending machine' for services.

What became clear through the interview process, was that the relatively one dimensional nature of the survey data became richer and clearer through further discussion. In the case of professionalism and emotions, the survey data created a complex and at times contradictory picture, but interviews allowed respondents to articulate their view further. As a consequence, all interviewees developed a view that allowed emotions to sit within their *own* constructs of the profession (albeit in different ways). This was despite the

profile of the interviewee cohort including some survey respondents who appeared to have a very negative view about the compatibility of emotions.

7.3 - Emotions and organisational context

The analysis of results has so far been largely focused on the individual social worker and their relationships with service users. It is of course important to place these workers within the wider context of the teams, buildings, networks and agencies to help explore why social workers may feel and act the way they do, and also to illuminate areas of support or obstruction in relation to the emotional content of their practice.

The survey contained 3 direct questions in relation to this issue. Within the Likert scaled questions I had anticipated that supervision would have a potentially pivotal role in supporting and exploring the emotional content of practice and as a consequence I asked two questions which approached this from different angles. I was also interested in other forums in which social workers would be able to express and articulate the emotional aspects of their practice and so provided a list of potential forums (giving an opportunity to add others) and asked respondents to highlight all that apply. They were then asked to identify the most common forum.

The two questions relating to supervision are detailed below in table 30 and 31.

"I can explore emotions in supervision"			
Strongly agree:		14.8%	16
Agree:		43.5%	47
Slightly agree:		18.5%	20
Slightly disagree:		6.5%	7
Disagree:		13.0%	14
Strongly disagree:		3.7%	4

Table 30 – Responses to "I can explore emotions in supervision"

"The key focus of supervision is to discuss the practical aspects of my caseload"			
Strongly agree:		6.7%	7
Agree:		34.3%	36
Slightly agree:		19.0%	20
Slightly disagree:		16.2%	17
Disagree:		20.0%	21
Strongly disagree:		3.8%	4

Table 31 – Reponses to "The key focus of supervision is to discuss the practical aspects of my caseload"

Table 30 suggests that for the majority of respondents (as anticipated) supervision is a forum in which emotions can be explored. 76.8% of respondents agreed to some extent that they could explore emotions in supervision. The remaining 23.2% felt they could not, which clearly has implications for them in terms of support and guidance. The second question highlighted in table 31 provides a balance to this and gives an indication of the possible balance that may exist within the supervisory relationship. 60% felt the practical elements of casework were the key element of supervision with 40% not. It is not clear from this question what the key elements may

be, so we need to look deeper into the data to explore this further. In addition to this we will explore alternative forums for exploring emotions.

7.3.1 – Forums for exploring emotions

In table 32 the responses to the suggested potential forums for articulating emotions are presented. It is important to draw attention to the word 'articulating', as it brings in the potential for simply recording emotions as well as exploring, using or reflecting upon them.

23. I am able to articulate my emotions in the following contexts (mark all that apply)			
Case notes:		n/a	12
Service user contact:		n/a	30
Reports:		n/a	12
Contact with involved agencies:		n/a	39
Case conferences:		n/a	22
Informal staff contact:		n/a	73
Children's hearings:		n/a	8
Court procedures:		n/a	6
Supervision:		n/a	62
Multi-agency meetings:		n/a	24
Internal staff meetings:		n/a	55
Other *(please specify)*:		n/a	5

Table 32 – Reponses to "I am able to articulate my emotions in the following contexts"

The first thing that emerges from this question is that social workers have a broad range of contexts within which to articulate emotions. I had anticipated that supervision would be a key forum and this was reinforced by the responses in tables 30 and 32. I had not anticipated that the most cited forum would be informal contact with colleagues. This is a key finding from the data, and one which is further fleshed out in the free-text responses that followed the above question and also formed a part of the discussion within the interview phase.

All respondents identified a combination of potential forums in which they explored emotions, which reinforces the sense that there are multiple contexts for the articulation of emotion. More light can be shone on the hierarchy of these forums if we consider which forums were identified as the most common by those respondents who answered the question.

Contexts identified as most commonly used to articulate emotions	**Number of respondents**
Informal contact with colleagues	N=44
Supervision	N=15
Staff meetings	N=13
Service user contact	N=5
Multi-agency networks	N=3

Table 33 – Forums for exploring emotions

The above table shows that only 5 of the forums suggested were chosen as the most common one. The response rate for informal contact with colleagues is very striking and places the aforementioned responses about

supervision in a sharper light, in the sense that although many respondents do use supervision to articulate their emotions, it is within an informal sphere that most felt able to do so. It is important to acknowledge that all these responses were motivated by the respondent feeling that it was the most common type of forum for *them*, and as such the above table does not represent a hierarchy in terms of individual workers rather it is a hierarchy in terms of the picture emerging from the wider cohort of respondents. Due to this, I will provide examples of the comments that add depth to each category in turn, and I will provide an analysis and commentary to each one.

1. Informal contact with colleagues

Robert (Team manager, adult care) – *"Informal contact with fellow staff members is usually the only safe feeling place to discuss emotions. Supervision should be but seems to be sliding towards a blame culture and bullying."*

Renate (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"Only with other colleagues in informal settings. People who bring up their emotions in other contexts are thought to be unstable. Recently a colleague did bring up an emotional issue in supervision and was surprised that in the subsequent minutes that were produced he was described as 'not being able to cope anymore."*

Ella (Social worker, children and families) – *"Informal staff contact because feels safest also one needs to be clear about how to use emotions constructively and not just to react emotionally."*

Susan (Residential social worker) – *"Informal staff contact. Provides the opportunity there and then to share feelings whilst other forums may require waiting, by which time the emotion has been dealt with."*

John (Social worker, adult care) – *"Informal supports from peers is the best way to respond to emotional issues as often colleagues have a shared experience. From these discussions will often come other ways of looking at an issue that help decrease anxiety or frustration."*

These quotes are a sample from the survey which illustrate common themes. The issue of *'safety'* emerged as a key theme. It was directly referred to by 6 respondents, but it was evident as an issue by several others. This is the notion that to explore and articulate emotions (most commonly in supervision) could potentially leave the worker vulnerable. The quote from Robert is a powerful one in that it is from the perspective of a team manager who has responsibility for supervision as well as experience of being supervised. We will learn more from Robert later in this section through his interview responses. In the case of this quote though, he highlights an issue about the way expressing the emotional content of practice can be taken and used as a judgement about the professional responsibility and actions. He refers to a bullying culture which is alarming, but one which Renate adds more light to by making the link between articulating emotions and being deemed not to be coping. This experience of supervision may well reflect a strong technical/rational construct of practice which does not allow for the exploration of the emotional elements in practice, and in turn places emotions within the arena of coping and anxiety. This is clearly at odds with the view that emotions have a significant role within social work practice, and even challenges the idea that supervision could be used as a means of removing them from decision making. It is striking that many of those who chose informal contact as their key forum for discussing emotions, used

supervision as the starting point for their justification. The issue of safety is a key issue emerging in this thesis and will be explored later in this section from the interview data, and also taken forward in discussion.

Ella touches on the issue of safety, but highlighted a potential benefit of informal support. She suggests that the process of discussion and articulation in a safe environment allows for the emotional content of practice to be reflected upon and managed. This may point to two key potential positives in that this would allow workers to regulate and utilise their emotions constructively within their practice and also perhaps lay the foundations for articulating emotions in a manner that is more usable to then take into certain supervisory relationships.

Susan and John highlight the positive uses and reasons for informal support from colleagues. The idea that peers have shared experiences and knowledge is a persuasive one and was a commonly cited reason. This suggests a proactive use of peers as a resource for learning and support and suggests that 'practice wisdom' may have a more significant place within the reality of social work practice and support, than some managerialist approaches to supervision may suggest. By this I mean, that even in a situation where a worker presents their work in supervision (and possibly written recording) in an emotionally detached manner, the emotional aspects of practice may well be being explored and processed in a less visible informal environment. Susan notes a further contextual point about the

immediacy of peer support in the sense that she does not need to wait for her next formal supervision meeting to explore her emotions. This also highlights the fluid and reactive nature of practice and the emotional content within it. It is clear within a residential setting that support often needs to be reactive in nature, but this point was echoed by others who identified their office and staff room as key locations to access ready support. This adds a practical and responsive underpinning to the use of informal support from colleagues.

2. Supervision

Mick (Team manager, criminal justice) – *"Supervision as this is where I can discuss any issues relating to my feelings and know it will be treated with confidentiality."*

Alison (Social worker, adult care) - *"Supervision: I have a trusting relationship with my supervisor and can express myself openly."*

Jen (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"Supervision - because I set the agenda and I feel it is a secure enough environment to share emotions and feelings."*

In the light of the strong support for the informal use of peer support, it is heartening to see that for some respondents, their experience of supervision was positive and that they experienced similar qualities in the support they received. Themes of trust and safety are touched upon and the notion that there is a confidential aspect to supervision is an interesting one. It seems at odds with the aforementioned concerns about how supervisors can

respond to emotional elements of practice. What does emerge is that the quality of the relationship with a supervisor is pivotal. Mick and Alison both talk about the strength and nature of the relationship being a key aspect. Jen presents an interesting dynamic within her supervisory relationship which places her in control of the content and focus (within reason) and as such the implicit permissions and associated safety issues are within her domain. This begins to suggest possible partnership models for supervision which will be taken forward in further discussion within this thesis.

3. Staff meetings

Rhiannon (Social worker, adoption and fostering) - *"Internal staff meetings- that's where I feel it is most appropriate and safest to explore own emotions. Need to be clear about how you are feeling so that you can then be clear in how you present info in other forums."*

As noted in tables 29 and 30, staff meetings were positively viewed in terms of exploring emotions and were only 2 responses less than supervision in terms of being seen as the key forum for exploring emotions. Rhiannon notes the issue of safety in relation to staff meetings. She suggests that this is a forum which allows the emotional aspects of practice to be explored as means of seeking clarity prior to presenting in other forums. Rhiannon stated she did not record emotions in writing nor share them with service users elsewhere in the survey. With that profile in mind, it is possible that she valued staff meetings as a place to share her emotional experiences but also to equip her to present her practice in a manner which did not include

reference to them. It may also be that staff meetings share some of the benefits of informal contact in that workers are able to share experiences with others who have direct knowledge of the nature and context of the practice issues.

4. Service user contact

Abigail (Social worker, children and families) – *"In service user contact in groupwork (which is the bulk of my work) where being open and honest emotionally encourages service users to recognise and increase their self awareness."*

Abigail offers a practice based response to the question about which forum is most commonly used when articulating emotions. She offers a persuasive argument for using and expressing one's emotions within a groupwork context to create an environment which facilitates openness and honesty. This echoes previous points about the potential use of emotional role-modeling, and I believe it is applicable across a range of contexts of practice. It may be that for Abigail that the nature of her work pushed it higher up her hierarchy of forums. This sits comfortably with her wider profile as someone who shares emotions with services users and writes about them within reports.

The final category of multi agency settings did not attract further comment from respondents and as such formed a line of inquiry in the interview phase.

The above discussion highlighted a range of issues explored in more depth in the interview phase. These were:

- The issue of 'safety' and articulating emotions
- The nature and use of informal contact
- The experience of supervision and the impact this has on articulation of emotions
- Exploration of wider organisational context and messages regarding emotions.

I will now present excerpts from the interviews to further add depth and understanding to the issues emerging from the survey data. I will take each theme in turn for clarity.

7.3.2 - Issue of "safety" and articulating emotions

Olivia (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"Safety depends on your supervisor and how they view supervision …..My last two they were fine about emotions but as social workers we need to back it up with something else. The safety issue is about covering your back so that you have done all the checks so that you are responsible for your own practice."*

Pete (Social worker, criminal justice) - *"If you don't have a senior where you feel safe then it is just tick boxes and case management…can be partly about that but needs to be about the stresses and strains of practice….my last two supervisors were less so and we just looked at cases and process……maybe it is to do with the training of seniors …..good supervision helps teams and build motivation and good to talk about positive stuff too"*

I explicitly raised the issue of safety within each interview to try to explore what this might mean to each interviewee and to also explore what they feel generally about it emerging as an issue. What was striking during the interviews was that interviewees tended to answer the question by making links with supervision and also in terms of their *own* emotional well being. In terms of the coding of responses within the interviews, most commonly references to safety coincided with positive or negative codings for supervision and agency culture. This lends the responses to this issue a particular focus on the individual worker's emotions and the impact on themselves and in turn their practice, rather than emotions within the piece of practice itself.

Olivia echoes the notion that the individual supervisory relationship is crucial. This may be in terms of individual approaches to the concept of supervision and also in terms of the nature and quality of the relationship between the two participants. I use the word participants hesitantly as it may suggest a sharing of control and power in terms of the focus of supervision. This is not reflected in the response of most interviewees who view the quality and remit of their supervisory relationships as something they experience and respond to rather than co-create. Olivia also places the discussion of the emotional aspects of practice in the sphere of defensibility and presentation of practice. This is linked explicitly to the issue of safety and the core of her argument appears to be that it would be *unsafe* to make decisions and present your practice without identifying the role of emotions. This appears to hint at

good reflective practice rather than being about the removal of emotions. It is in circumstances where this is not permitted that reflection and clarity of actions becomes uncertain.

Pete takes this point further by highlighting his experience of what happens when it is deemed unsafe to explore emotions within supervision. He suggests that supervision becomes (perhaps inevitably) more procedurally driven and may reflect a more technically rational approach to practice. He rightly suggests that the reality of practice becomes shrouded by such an approach and in a sense the experience of social work in its entirety is not fully explored. He broadens out the issue of the dependency on the supervisory relationship beyond personalities and approaches to highlight the need for training specifically on such issues if it is deemed desirable for supervision to have an holistic ethos.

Steve (Team manager, adult care) - *"I am currently going to counselling which the dept pays for…limited sessions…but the thing is she is helping me to learn ways to cope rather than address issues with line manager."*

Robert (Social worker, adult care) – *"I don't think about expressing emotions in terms of safety……..I think they do need to be expressed to others, or else we are a bunch of officious robots potentially…….I have never worked in a culture where it has not felt safe."*

Steve gives a vivid example from his own current circumstances which he has been referred to counselling services to support his anxieties around challenges relating to his practice. He recognises that such an opportunity has been helpful on one level, but that it takes the emotional issues relating

directly to his practice outside of the supervisory relationship and funnels it towards something more akin to a health and welfare issue. It is interesting that he hints that this presents a barrier to then putting the benefits of this support back into his workplace. This suggests that by taking emotional difficulties outside of the core business of practice and supervision, there is not necessarily a feedback loop into practice, which further underlines the marginalisation and disconnection of such issues.

When raising the issue of safety, I am conscious that the responses often focussed on difficult or negative experiences. Robert's comments provide a balance in that he feels able to stake a claim for exploring emotions (congruent with his views more broadly about emotion) in supervision because not to do so would reduce his experience of being a social worker to a much narrower entity. The key message is that unless one feels *safe* to make this claim, then it is very difficult for social workers to gain from the opportunities to explore the emotional content of their practice in supervision.

7.3.3 - The nature and use of informal supports

Steve (Team manager, adult care) – *"I have a trusted colleague who I can exchange weaknesses…a bit like a problem shared is a problem halved. I am not looking for solutions but just being able to say this is a bloody hard situation and I am struggling….can release the pressure ….you need that because of the emotions in the job and if you are not getting the back up from the system you need to find it elsewhere…..it is also because is not minuted."*

Olivia (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"With friends and colleagues I unpick things like finding someone attractive but somehow it seems unprofessional and uncomfortable but yet it such a basic thing…my experiences of working as a counsellor is different where such things are always unpicked and are seen as crucial."*

Megan (Social worker/supervisor, children and families)- *"Peer support is crucial…..we have a system where new folk have mentors within the practitioners team……lets people run things past people for support …its about people understanding what you are going through…a problem shared is a problem halved."*

Helena (Social worker, criminal justice) - *"I am not sure if informal support from colleagues is good, as it can create a negative atmosphere and sharing this can just magnify issues."*

Steve echoes the message from the survey data that one of the key benefits of sharing the emotional content of your practice with colleagues is that there is a sense that they will know and have experienced similar issues within their own practice. This clearly allows for practice wisdom to be shared, but also may go some way to addressing the issue of safety, as there is an implicit or explicit recognition that these issues are valid and are part of the experience of being a social worker. The comment about the un-minuted nature of such discussions is a crucial one and sets it apart from more formal mechanisms such as supervision or formal meetings. It again may respond to the issue of safety in terms of feeling able to explore emotions, but also reflects a rather concerning and covert approach to articulating emotions. This covert approach to emotions, coupled with previous discussions in relation to the suppression or removal of emotions from recording practice that will form a key part of the findings of this thesis.

Olivia again highlights the supportive elements of speaking about emotional responses to service users with colleagues, but more crucially she draws a distinction between the ethos of her other role as a Counsellor and that of social work. She states that not only are emotions explored in relation to her role as a counsellor but that this is a necessary and explicit aspect of this context. This potentially provides an example of how social work could integrate such an ethos into its systems and profile as a profession. Megan indicates that within her social work team there is a quasi-formal mentoring system which allows social workers to seek 'informal' support through an identified mentor. This is a useful signpost for later discussions as it suggests that the aforementioned benefits of informal support from colleagues can be harnessed and given a visible status, and can potentially ensure that there are supportive mechanisms that sit outside of the formal supervisory relationship. This is particularly relevant given our discussion about the variability of the nature and quality of supervisory relationships.

The comment from Helena is cogent in that it provides a cautionary point about the potential for informal discussions to magnify and dwell on negatives issues rather than having an active and clear role in addressing emotional issues. This is useful, in that it emphasises the looseness of informal support in terms of quality and appropriateness. Although, it was overwhelmingly the most commonly cited forum used, it is important consider that it may not be available and/or useful to all workers. This brings

us back to the mentoring scheme mentioned above, which may go some way to clarifying the focus and availability of informal supports.

7.3.4 - The experience of supervision and the impact this has on the articulation of emotions

Jimmy (Social worker/supervisor, children and families) – *"Supervision I have to say it is mainly case management…partly because I choose it to be so (1.5 hours a month) …I update my team manager…I may say I am quite proud of a bit of work…if I said I was struggling (which I wouldn't) it may be seen as a black mark."*

Simone (Social worker, children and families) – *"I suspect that being emotional is seen as not functioning and would become an occupational health issue. I think having a good greet and sharing problems is healthy…I think I would be the healthy one because I am congruent….I am upset so I am crying…..- my supervision is not a place to share emotions, it is a task focussed exercise telling me what to do and when to do it."*

Elizabeth (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"I have had different seniors and they have all been different….some have been better at talking about emotions…..most have asked how I am…which Is different from the emotions in practice. The paperwork that we use in supervision does not lend itself for it…..it is all service user led, rather than wider non case specific stuff…..the paper with service user name on it goes in their file."*

Megan (Social worker/supervisor, children and families) – *"The guidance I get from the council for being a supervisor talks about the welfare of employees in addition to case management and professional development…there is a personal interpretation of guidelines and sometimes the time constraints impact where you can't fit it all in and risks around cases take precedence."*

Jimmy provides a picture of his supervisory relationship which suggests that he does not feel able/willing to share the emotional elements of his practice with his supervisor particularly if these emotions were challenging or difficult.

What is interesting is that he perceives this as something he controls and edits, rather than it being driven solely by the supervisor. This provides a counterbalance to the emerging sense that the approach of the supervisor is the key driver in terms of the content of what is shared in supervision. The rather oppressive nature of a 'black mark' as suggested by Jimmy, is explored further by Simone as she suggests that articulating emotions that are causing a worker difficulty may be interpreted as a wellbeing issue and one which takes it away from the realms of a practice based discussion and into an individualised support and welfare arena. The earlier example of the experience of Steve and the disconnect he felt between counselling support and his day to day practice suggests that this is not necessarily an effective response. It also underlines and reinforces the potential disconnection between the articulation of emotions and the articulation of direct practice.

Simone and Elizabeth both describe a task orientated approach to supervision which narrows the focus down to a point where the emotional elements of the practice are squeezed out. Elizabeth highlights that the actual paperwork associated with supervision provides a framework for the discussion. This she suggests directs attention to the practical elements of cases rather than encouraging a more reflective tone to proceedings. It could be argued of course that even a practical focussed discussion could have a place for emotions if we accept the centrality of emotions within social practice. Elizabeth notes that she has had a varied experience of supervisors which again underlines the relationship between the experience of

supervision and the ethos and approach of the individual participants involved.

Megan contributes usefully from a supervisor's perspective as she notes that the guidance and training she receives to prepare her to undertake the role of supervisor includes reference to the welfare of employees and promotes this as being a core element. She sheds light on the reliance on individual approaches to supervision and notes there is implicit space for supervisors to interpret guidelines in different ways and with differing emphases. The focus on the emotional articulation of practice as being equated to welfare is a very narrow view of emotions in the context of this thesis but does provide an indication of the peripheral status it can have in relation to supervision.

7.3.5 - The exploration of wider organisational contexts and messages about the articulation of emotions

Derek (Social worker, children and families) – *"In terms of organisational culture there is a tacit acknowledgment that folk are emotional. The solution is optional counselling should you need it…..supervision is a place for it….my manager is an emotional kind of person and that allows the team to be more like that too. There are policy and guidance documents about wellbeing that get cascaded down that we are supposed to read."*

Robert (Care manager, adult care) – *"Supervision looks at cases case by case and the format that we use is that she types things in to a form there and then……I get asked if there is "anything you want to add"….nothing explicit about feelings or wellbeing, but the latent culture is healthy……we have new Employee development Review format which seem more touchy feely and about how you are feeling about your cases."*

Simone (Social worker, children and families) – *"Organisationally it would be the revolution of social work to have emotions recognised organisationally. It is that far away…..which is hilarious because we work with people everyday."*

Pete (Social worker, criminal justice) – *"The organisational culture of the council says they recognise that the job is stressful….and that they appreciate us…..that is also a national message too…….that is as far as it goes though…..more about understanding about what we are going through rather than addressing it….the next level should be what they are going to do about it….on an immediate level it is more supportive, so maybe it cascades down?"*

Derek echoes the previous message that when the emotional content of practice becomes significantly difficult to manage or articulate, it can be channelled off towards a counselling style service. This reflects an organisational message that such issues sit outside of the core business of supervision and indeed practice. It suggests that such difficulties and dilemmas are outside the perceived norms of practice rather than an inherent and congruent aspect of it. He highlights that the wellbeing aspect of emotions and practice has a status in that policy and guidance documents are circulated to staff. Pete notes that this reflects an organisational recognition of the emotional context of practice but falls short of addressing it or embracing it. Robert vividly underlines this with his reference to an "anything you wish to add" approach to emotional difficulties. It is heartening that Robert identifies a scheme which has as it its focus a health and well being approach. Whilst this reflects an awareness of emotions in the context of wellbeing, it is a very narrow view of emotions and social work, and again siphons it into an arena that is not directly linked to the

articulation and discussion of practice. Simone’s suggestion that a revolution would be required to organisationally embrace the emotional elements of practice is a powerful statement, but seems to be borne out by the narrow conception of emotions and wellbeing evident across the responses.

Chapter 8 – Discussion - Emotions and social work practice

8.1 - Introduction

This thesis has illuminated a range of issues relating to the role of emotions. Social workers often talked about how they felt about their practice in terms of the emotional impact on themselves and also highlighted the complexity of the emotional elements within their relationships with service users. This chapter seeks to explore three key areas that have emerged from the data and which examine the complexity and centrality of the emotional elements of practice. These areas can broadly be grouped as follows

- Emotions and relationships with service users
- Emotions and writing in social work
- Use of emotions in practice

These areas are interlinked and go some way to laying the foundations of the chapter that considers the role of emotions within the construct of 'being a social work *professional*'. The results in this thesis may have presented a complex picture of the role of emotions, however the importance of relationships with service users was salient. The reported feelings associated with these relationships included fear, joy, anger, familiarity, attraction, frustration, confusion, satisfaction and power. Yet, the omission and/or

editing of such a plethora of emotions from the written aspects of practice were particularly acute.

This is particularly interesting if we consider my conceptual framework for emotions, in that it touches upon a range of levels. There is a clear sense of the range of emotions experienced by social workers in response to the events and stimuli encountered through practice. The interpersonal aspects of these emotions are illustrated through the practice examples and the sense that emotions can have an intended impact on others is evident (Zapf, 2002). In addition to this, the notion of 'being professional' places a set of contextual rules, norms and pressures in terms of the way emotions are experienced, understood and expressed (Turner and Stets, 2005). Finally, there is an additional level of emotional expression evident in the written articulation of practice. This stretches the professional presentation at the heart of Hochschild's (1983) work to embrace a longer term and potentially premeditated editing and removal of emotional expression and experience from the recording of practice. It suggests a gulf between the experienced reality of direct practice with service users and the presentation and articulation of this practice. I will explore both sides of this picture and consider how such a balance can exist and if this is a desirable phenomenon. I will also reflect upon what the data may suggest in terms of the active use of emotions within practice.

8.2 - Emotions and relationships with service users

In the literature review and within the results in this thesis the importance and value placed on the relationship between social workers and service users is very evident. Links have been made between the construct of emotional intelligence and the establishment of a positive relationship which embodies social work codes of practice and responds to the literature about what service users want from social workers. A complex picture emerged in the results in terms of the how emotions are used, expressed, shared and controlled within relationships with service users. For example, there was a resounding affirmation for the role of empathy yet social workers presented a less clear picture in terms of the extent or appropriateness of sharing or revealing their own emotions within these relationships. There was a sense that for some social workers, they could control the outward expression of their emotions. The idea of 'sharing' emotions may be interpreted as the act of talking about how one feels. This aspect of emotional regulation would seem to lend itself more readily to the expression of an emotion after the event that triggers it. The more finely tuned emotional regulation involved in 'revealing' ones emotions maps more readily to the part of my conceptual framework which involves physiological aspects of emotions such as facial expressions (Kennedy-Moore and Watson, 1999). It is in this area that it is more difficult for social workers to be fully confident (or indeed conscious) of their ability to regulate. The example of the service user noting the arched back of the social worker whilst laughing, underlines the subtlety involved in

emotional expression within relationships. It is useful at this point to locate this picture within the construct of relationship based social work.

Ruch (2009) notes that relationship based models of practice have been developed from psycho-social approaches which focus on the individual within their wider context. They value the complexity that this gives rise to rather than attempting to reduce practice to a purely rational pursuit. Ward (2010:185) proposes the following conditions are required to underpin relationship based practice:

- *Placing a premium on working with the experience and process of a helping relationship.*
- *Attending to the emotional as well as cognitive elements for practice.*
- *Maximising opportunities for helpful communication.*
- *The need for reflection at a deep level.*
- *Focusing on the self of the worker*
- *An emphasis on personal qualities and values*.

The conditions listed above offer useful signposts in relation to the findings of this thesis. The results showed that social workers had a keen awareness and commitment to relationships with service users, yet the experience and process of those relationships were affected by context, personal resources and organisational support. Whilst workers valued the 'helping relationship'; they often expressed a lack of support or interest in these elements within

their supervisory relationships (nor as noted later in this chapter a presence in their written accounts of practice). This undermined in some cases the required support and opportunity for reflection and examination of self that underpins relationship based approaches. I will pick up on the issue of support and supervision in the next chapter, but what is clear from the results is that social workers *are* engaged in meaningful and affective relationships despite the pressures and compromises that impinge upon them.

Hennessey (2011) notes the importance of knowing one's *self* and being aware of one's emotional reactions within a social work relationship. This links well to the emotional awareness and regulation aspects of emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Ward (2010) notes that the term 'self' is a complex one insofar that it involves one's beliefs, experiences and values but is not a fixed entity. By this Ward means that our 'self' will change and fluctuate over time and from context to context. This was reflected in the varied examples in the results where respondents highlighted circumstances in which they would share their feelings, or not, depending on the circumstances and the dynamics of the relationship. This links clearly with the socially constructed aspect of the conceptual framework (Turner and Stets, 2005), but also underlines the cognitive role of our previous experiences and associated models, and how these may be used and/or triggered in different situations (Oatley and Johnson-Laird, 1996). This

reminds us that a relationship based approach is contextual and professionally orientated rather than a neutral and fixed approach.

I have highlighted the apparent tension between tuning into the emotional world of service users and the more guarded view about sharing one's own feelings with service users. I am conscious that relationship based practice is located within the context of roles and boundaries and that use of self is not to be simply equated to friendship or unguarded personal disclosure (Hennessey, 2011). However, I am equally conscious that the desire for genuineness, trust, warmth and acceptance articulated within service user literature (Harding & Beresford, 1995) requires a degree of emotional involvement and exposure to establish a reciprocal relationship. In the context of nursing, Smith and Lorentzon (2005) note that nurses felt able to bring their use of self into play despite the limits of a professional role. This is reflected in my conceptual framework in that there are internal private aspects to emotional appraisal and expression which take place despite wider context and which draw on other sources of reference (i.e. personal experiences and values). In addition to this, I would want to underline that emotional attunement, regulation and communication is a two-way process and the guarding or removal of emotions may not be a realistic approach to relationship based practice even if some respondents felt they had achieved it. The previously mentioned example in the results section that described a service user noting the arching of a social worker's back whilst laughing as being an indication of genuineness is a stark example of this. This example

underlines the presence of emotional intelligence and attunement within the relationship between service user and social worker, and suggests that neither partner within the relationship controls or has sole responsibility for the emotional climate of the relationship.

This issue of communication and sharing of emotions within a relationship between a social worker and service user can be looked at further in relation to empathy. 99% of respondents felt that to have and to express empathy within a social work relationship was important. Morse, Anderson, Botter, Young, O'Brien & Solberg (1992) propose that empathy involves the following elements:

- **Emotive** – the ability to tune into emotions of others
- **Moral** – an internal altruism which serves as a source of motivation to be empathic.
- **Cognitive** – the ability to then understand and maintain objectivity.
- **Behavioral** – ability to communicate the attunement and understanding within the relationship.

These elements of empathy require great depth and connection within a relationship. The establishment of a trusting relationship requires the worker to be able to jointly explore and seek a shared understanding of the world of the service user. The first facet of empathy noted above can be linked to the emotional intelligence of the worker and their ability to 'hear' and attune

themselves with the perspectives and feelings of the service user. The second aspect can be usefully rooted in the codes of practice in terms of the value placed on establishing trusting and respectful relationships (SSSC, 2009). The cognitive aspect links with the aforementioned discussion of use of self and would be supported by ongoing opportunities for reflection. Finally, the behavioral aspect is about the ability to communicate empathy within the relationship. It is at this point that the worker faces the balance of communicating a genuine connection and understanding, which by definition requires a connection to their own emotional world, and the need to be aware of roles and boundaries. Reynolds and Scott (1999) suggest that empathy can be seen (although this is contested) as an *emotion* of the worker and that it is their skills base that allows and facilitates the communication of this. I will explore the tension between 'being professional' and the role of emotions in a later chapter, but at this stage it is important in the context of the social work relationship to consider the balance between genuineness and empathy.

Hennessey (2011) notes that genuineness is at odds with the notion of putting up professional boundaries and in turn this suggests that there may be room for social workers to share their own emotional responses and understandings within the relationship. Perhaps the phrase 'professional emotions' that emerged within the data best describes this, as it notes the professional context and the impact this has on the relationships with service users. This ties in with the notion of emotional dexterity suggested by Bolton

and Boyd (2003) in their response to the work of Hochschild (1983). There was evidence in the data of emotional dexterity *within* practice, yet less flexibility within the expression in writing. Reynolds and Scott (1999) note that the establishment of a trusting and warm relationship requires a genuine human connection *before* service users will share their own perspectives, and only then can these be tuned into and reflected back and explored in an empathic manner. Looked at in this way, the importance of use of self and the potential of sharing one's own emotions may be crucial at both the establishment and maintenance stages of a positive relationship. Sudbery (2002) concurs with this when he noted that the establishment and maintenance of a positive and trusting relationship with service users was required before any of the more tangible outcomes based aspects of social work can occur. This is a powerful point in that it holds up the dynamic and fluid complexities of relationships as being the catalyst and environment for the technical/rational aspects of practice to emerge, rather than being viewed as a marginalised aspect of practice.

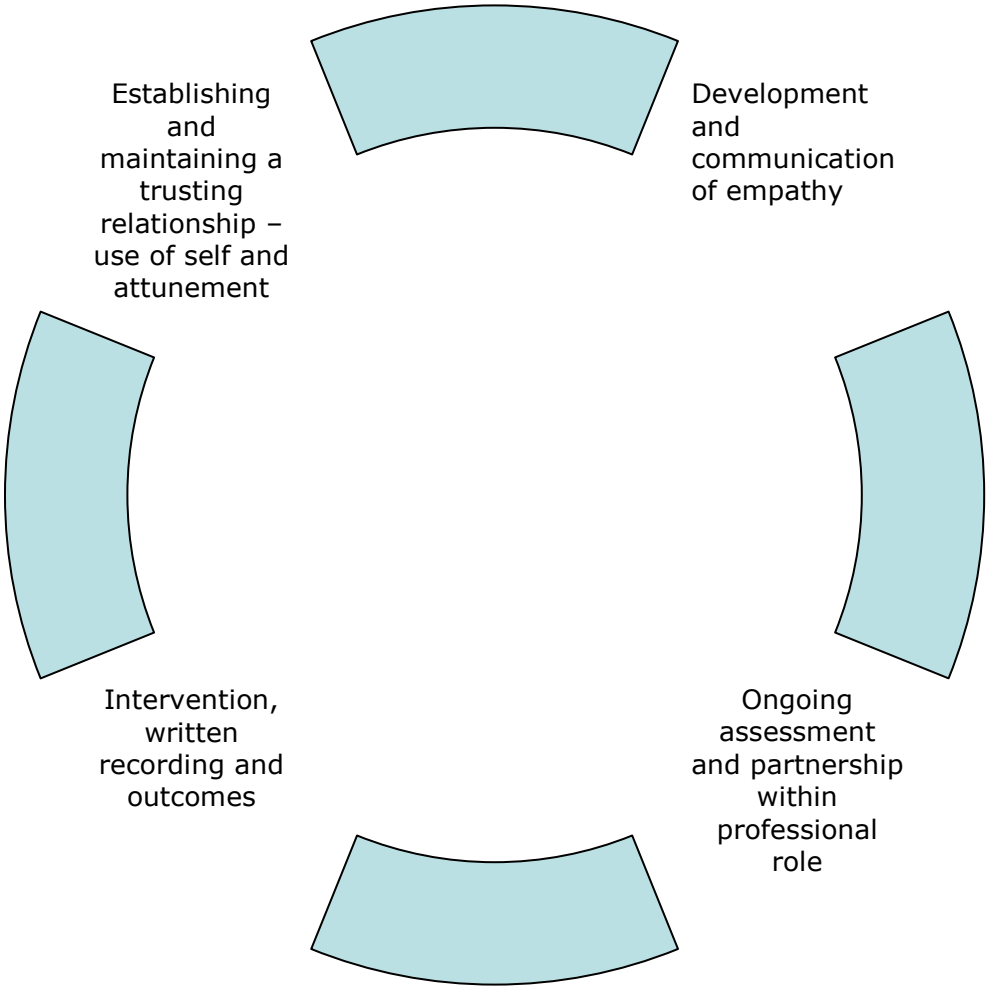

Diagram 5 - A relationship model for empathy and professional role

The above model is intended to illustrate the preceding discussion. The diagram is purposively cyclical as it highlights the fluid and multifaceted nature of relationships, rather than simply viewing the relationship and/or

associated actions as being a linear process. It presents the relationship between social worker and service user as one which requires an open and genuine use of self to establish a relationship of a quality which will enable an empathic approach to be used. Perhaps most crucially it is then explicitly linked to the aspects of practice that are more tangible and outcome focused. This is intended to break down the perceived barriers between the two aspects of practice and most importantly emphasise that they can't exist usefully in isolation. In terms of my conceptual framework, it also unites the individually motivated drivers behind emotional identification and expression, and the wider contextual norms, rules and pressures which have a role to play.

There were many examples in the results where the reported control and shielding of emotions was placed firmly in the context of being professional. I would argue that this is not a necessary division, and whilst awareness of role and function will help to guide a social worker to understand professional boundaries, this should not be, and cannot be at the exclusion or marginalisation of the two way emotional connection between worker and service user. To believe otherwise would be to take the social construction strand of emotions at the exclusion of the physiological, neurological, cognitive and interpersonal aspects of the conceptual framework. This brings us back to a core theme in this thesis which is the need for a cultural shift in terms of what is perceived as 'professional' to allow for the role of emotions in social work relationships to be less problematic. Happily, I do not view

this shift as seismic, as the preceding discussion about relationship based approaches to practice are not incongruous or unfamiliar in terms of the history of social work practice nor current professional codes and policies.

8.3 - Use of emotions in practice

I have referred often to my interest in *'the role of emotions in social work practice'* in this thesis. I have noted within the results chapters that social workers often responded to this inquiry through the lens of their *own* emotional reaction and experiences of practice. When they did focus on the role emotions had *within* their practice it was often in the context of the perceived tensions noted above. In this section it is my intention to seek to explore what can be learnt from the results in terms of purposeful use of emotions within social work practice rather than viewing them as simply a reaction to be felt or requiring containment. This links well to my conceptual framework which notes that emotions can prepare us to respond in ways which help us achieve goals and make an impact on others (Rosenberg, 1990).

In the results chapters I noted the theme of *motivation* in terms of how one's emotional reaction to a service user and/or their circumstances can impact upon the intensity and direction of practice. I provided the vivid example of the social worker who associated a service user positively with her brother and in turn noted the impact this had on her motivation to "*go the extra*

mile". Gross (1998) noted that emotions provide individuals with key information with which to clarify and reason about how and what to do in any given situation. This can be linked to the aforementioned example from the results if we consider the notion of *emotional energy* suggested by Collins (1990) which refers to the idea that emotions and our responses to them drive us forward (as above) or lead us to withdraw. This is crucial in unpicking the potential of a two-tier type service where emotional responses dictate the drive and priority given to each case and inequalities potentially could emerge. If given the appropriate permissions and opportunities to explore one's emotional reactions within forums such as supervision then this can be managed, rather than simply editing it out of the presentation of one's practice. The underlying mechanisms and organisational culture that underpin such permissions will be explored in the next two chapters.

Fredrickson (1998) gives examples of links between emotions and subsequent actions. For example, she suggests that the emotion of 'interest' inspires investigation. She contends that this is an example of a positive emotion which opens up one's focus, whilst negative emotions tend to narrow the focus of one's actions. Goleman (1995) makes a link between the felt emotion of 'worry' and the tendency to reflect. This ties in well with the need and propensity for social workers to seek and value opportunities to explore the complex and confusing aspects of their practice. Both examples have relevance for social work practice in that they reflect the basic interaction between felt emotion and one's actions. This links well with the notion of

'gut feeling' evident within the results and how this can prompt one to ask a further question or follow up a certain line of investigation. These lessons are evident in the messages from Munro (2011) in terms of the need for autonomy and trust in individual judgement. This again would require a shift in professional culture to facilitate this, where phenomena such as gut feeling and practice wisdom can attain a visible and valued profile, rather than a culture where the more tangible evidence based aspects of practice tend to prevail (or at least be presented and recorded). This cultural shift will form the basis of the discussion of the final chapter.

The emphasis on autonomy and professional judgement is not unproblematic as discussed previously due to the competing narratives about outcomes, evidence and regulation. However, such qualities are enshrined within social work qualifying standards and competencies (SSSC, 2003) and also in more recent professional literature (Munro, 2011; SSSC ,2006). If we accept this aspect of practice as being of value, then the role of emotions can become much more evident. Ferguson (2010) provided a fascinating account of the impact of the daily experiences of social workers that vividly drew on the sights, sounds and smells of practice. He noted that this core sphere of practice was largely hidden from view and rarely spoken or written about. This is echoed within the results of this thesis where such discussions sit uncomfortably with being a professional. Ferguson noted that the danger of not allowing for such experiences to be explored and recorded leaves workers alone to be emotionally swayed and affected by their experiences. But, given

our previous discussion about the link between emotion and action it is clear that the opportunity to express and explore these emotions would allow workers to *use* them to contribute to the focus and direction of their practice.

Linked to this autonomous reality of daily practice, is the notion that social workers often work within a context of uncertainty and lack of clarity. Indeed, as noted earlier, the development and maintenance of a social work relationship takes time and is a fluid and organic entity. There is often a considerable distance in terms of time and content between the eventual recorded outcomes and recommendations that arise from a piece of practice and the development of the working relationship. It is within this blurry area where relationships and assessments emerge over time that social workers are in the thick of the emotional aspects of their practice. Cornish (2011) talks of the periods of 'not knowing' in social work practice and draws on Keats' (1817) concept of *negative capability* to help us understand what this stage is. Simply put, this concept refers to the ability of an individual to cope with uncertainties and be comfortable to do so without seeking immediate answers. This vividly links the feeling of uncertainty to the potential action of jumping to solutions. This degree of uncertainty she contends can lead to anxiety if there are not opportunities for reflection and analysis. This links well with the unconscious aspects of my conceptual framework and the need for reflexivity to enhance our self-knowledge about the sources of our emotions and associated behaviours (Rosenberg, 1990). This could be managed via supervision and also individually in terms of emotional

intelligence and self-awareness. In a sense social workers need be 'held' through the uncertainties of practice. Ruch (2010) drawing on the work of Bion (1962) talks about the concept of containment, whereby workers (or service users) are supported and engaged with despite the presence of significant challenges and barriers. This is another aspect where models of practice can usefully be applied to the sphere of the worker also. I would suggest that this notion of containment is crucial to support workers through the challenges of practice.

These synergies between approaches to practice and how social workers themselves are supported and practice emerged within the results in the form of role modeling. There was an good example from a criminal justice worker who modeled tolerance, optimism and anger control within his relationship with uncooperative service users in order to establish a trusting relationship *and* also to scaffold and model behaviors that would be helpful in terms of making an impact in the life of the service user. This example shows the process of emotional identification (anger), reflection (source of anger), social construction (professional role) and behaviour (role modeling) and as such touches on key aspects of my conceptual framework. In addition to this, those respondents who stated that they did share their emotions with service users did so partly out of openness and transparency, but also in terms of acknowledging the impact that behaviours and circumstances can have on others. This in turn could provide a basis for greater awareness and a platform for further discussion and work. These are

examples of when emotions can be used within the social work relationship as a means of establishing a relationship but also as *tool* in terms of achieving the outcomes desired of the intervention.

8.4 – Emotions and writing in social work

The results reported earlier regarding the extent to which emotions are recorded and presented in written form highlighted a stark example of where emotions do not appear to sit comfortably within social work practice. The tone of the qualitative responses suggested that to write about emotions was potentially 'unprofessional' and inappropriate in terms of what constitutes a valid record of assessment, intervention and decision making. Simply put; a technical/rational interpretation and presentation of practice was most commonly deemed the 'right' way to write about one's practice. This was at odds with the importance that many respondents placed on their relationships with service users and the associated emotional content of these relationships. This divergence between the reality of direct practice and the selective editing of the recording and presentation is an important finding in this thesis.

Writing in social work covers a broad range of formats and purposes. In the survey I asked specifically about casenotes and formal reports. Healy & Mulholland (2012) noted that casenotes are focused and factual accounts of the process and ongoing assessment of practice which can be used as an

historical record of involvement for the individual worker, colleagues and potentially service users. They note that formal reports have a direct impact on decision making forums and processes, and as such need to be accurate, fair and clear. What unites these two types of writing and any other written recordings in social work is that they are underpinned by a professional purpose. Healy & Mulholland (2012) suggest that this means that they should reflect the codes of practice in terms of their content and focus. For example, they should seek to acknowledge and value the views and perspectives of service users. Taking this link to professional codes and values a step further, I would wish to pick up on my use of the words 'factual' and 'accurate' as used earlier in this paragraph. It was clear from the data that such qualities within writing were seen as an obstacle and deterrent in terms of writing about emotions. It seemed that accuracy and validity were linked to outcomes of processes and tangible certainties. If we consider the discussion earlier in this chapter about the importance and inescapability of unknowns and uncertainty in practice then it seems that to remove and edit the emotional aspects of practice from written recording presents a less than 'accurate' or 'factual' account. This could turn the view of emotions and writing on its head, in the sense that I would argue that to write an account of practice that is authentic and seeks to present the process and content of practice in an open and genuine fashion *must* involve discussion of emotions and the relationship between worker and service user. This chimes with Munro (2011) who argues that these aspects of practice should be viewed as a source of information (alongside other streams of

information and knowledge) that is useful and credible. Given the conceptual framework that underpins this thesis, it is clear that emotions are an important part of the way social workers perceive, think and act within their practice. If we accept that it is important for social workers to engage in reflection about the sources of their emotions, then it is questionable whether it is authentic then to edit these thoughts and actions from their accounts of practice. As noted at the start of this chapter, this would appear to go beyond a social constructed professional expression of emotions to one which is much more purposeful and selective.

In the final chapter of this thesis I will pull together all the strands of the discussion and will note that to address this issue about the written recording of practice would require a wider cultural shift individually and organisationally. However, the *professional purpose* of writing in social work provides the current discussion with enough leverage to stake a claim for challenging the removal of emotions from writing. Healy & Mulholland (2012: 87) suggest that it is *"essential to cite the sources of professional opinion"* in writing. I would contend that if social workers are to present their practice in an open and accurate manner and be able to represent the nature, content and dynamics of the relationship at the heart of the practice then the emotional elements of their practice are one of the key sources of their professional judgement. If we accept the centrality of relationships in social work it would seem to be a key defining feature of the profession and associated judgements and opinions. It is of course essential that social

workers make clear the nature of the content of their writing whether it is factual, opinion or feelings, but having done so should be comfortable in the knowledge that they are presenting the richness and depth of their practice. I would suggest further, that this depth would improve the usability and communicability of written records and reports, which would chime with the messages of Munro (2011) in terms of the importance of the relationships with service users. In the conceptual framework we noted the impact of prevailing norms on how we experience and express emotions. It is evident that the removal of the emotional elements of practice from written recording will give subsequent readers of these reports an implicit steer as to what is important in terms of recording. Additionally, the edited version of practice may lead to subsequent workers experiencing emotional dissonance as their experiences in relation to a particular case may not mirror the information previously recorded.

Given the cultural shift required in terms of the content of reports and casenotes, it is worth considering the potentially more private sphere of reflective writing and journal keeping. Ward (2010) highlights the potential role that reflective writing can have in enhancing an understanding of one's practice and of one's self in relation to it. The Social Work Task Force (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2009) suggest that the inter *and* intra personal qualities of social workers are of importance and that opportunities for reflection and space to develop these qualities is crucial. The use of reflective writing would seem to be a useful forum for such

activities. What was interesting in the data from the survey and the interviews was that little mention was made of any opportunity or requirement to write reflectively. Indeed, when I pursued this within the interviews it was clear that there was not an expectation that social workers would produce reflective writing. The pressures of time and lack of an audience for such writing were cited as factors. Ward (2010) and Moon (2004) suggest that an audience is not required for the usefulness of reflective writing to be achieved. It is the process of ordering, editing and thinking associated with reflective writing that is the key. This chimes with the suggestion by Hafford-Letchfield (2009) that learning cultures within social work organisations can be informal and self-led as well as more formally structured.

From the perspective of a lecturer on an undergraduate social work programme, I am struck about the disconnection between the content and messages within our programme in terms of the importance of reflective writing and the apparent lack or inconsistency of it in practice. On our undergraduate programme students are required to write reflective accounts during and at the end of all practice learning opportunities and prepare for supervision sessions by maintaining a reflective journal. The reason that students are required to do this is due to the belief that it is important for students to think about their practice in a critical and analytical manner and record this accordingly. We encourage them to consider their emotional reactions alongside identifying other sources which impact upon what they do

and why they do it. Through this process, students are then able to demonstrate a deeper understanding of their practice and their development as a social worker. This sits conceptually very comfortably as it mirrors the reflexive element of emotional appraisal (Schacter and Singer, 1962; Rosenberg, 1990) and the meanings we are then able to attach to our emotional responses. Ward (2010) notes the importance of education and practice having strong links and synergies, and this seems to be a stark example of where the pressures of resources and time, when coupled with an outcomes focused conception of supervision and practice drive a wedge between these spheres.

It would be hard to argue against the usefulness of reflection and its written form, yet it appears to be marginalised due to competing pressures and approaches. Hennessey (2011) and Howe (2008) both note the importance of being able to step away from one's practice and have space to express and explore the complex and confusing elements of practice. Whether this is undertaken in writing or within other forums such as supervision, it is clear that a cultural ethos needs to be developed which encourages and values it. If such a cultural shift is made, then a context of trust and safety may be developed to support it. Beddoe (2010) emphasises that trust is essential if the uncertainties and complexities of the practice can be revealed and explored. Howe (2008) usefully notes that such a culture mirrors that of the desirable conditions of a relationship between worker and service user.

8.5 - Conclusion

This has highlighted the inescapable role that emotions have within social work practice in terms of motivation, relationship building, assessments and interventions. The need for a cultural shift in terms of the centrality of emotions and relationships is required if this role is to be fully recognised and utilised. The distance between the reality of direct practice and the content of written recording is a vivid example of the distance of travel required.

The next two chapters seek to locate this discussion in the wider context of social work organisations, policy, professionalism, regulation and support. This is important if we are to clarify and develop a sense of the cultural and organisational shift required.

Chapter 9 – Discussion - Exploring emotions: organisational context, supervision and informal supports.

9.1 – Introduction

A key theme that emerged from the data was the diverse experiences that social workers had in terms of the opportunities they had to explore, articulate and reflect upon the emotional content of their practice. In the next chapter I will explore the role of emotions within the context of 'being professional'. That discussion will examine the sociological construction of emotions and the impact this has on how social workers present themselves in their work, which will build on this chapter. This is a key aspect of the conceptual framework that underpins this thesis. In this chapter, I will focus on what can be learnt from the experiences of the respondents within this thesis and consider how best the emotional aspects of practice can be explored, harnessed and supported.

There were three key areas identified within the results where the emotional content of practice may be valued and explored. These areas are:

- Organisational context
- Supervision
- Informal support from peers

A key finding was the inconsistency of messages regarding the appropriateness of articulating emotions across all three domains. This chapter will explore and consider the relationship between these factors in order to develop a clearer sense of the challenges and opportunities that it highlights for social workers and the organisations in which they operate.

9.2 - Emotions and social work organisations

Jones (2001) in his study of the views of frontline social workers in England found that there was a strong sense that social workers felt unsupported, emotionally overwhelmed and demoralised. Jones linked this despondent profile in part to the messages that social workers received from the organisations in which they worked in terms of how they were trusted and valued. The responses within this thesis do not entirely mirror the apparently beleaguered profile within Jones' study, but the impact of the teams and organisations in which social workers work on their experience of practice was very evident.

Ayre (2001) points to the external pressures which impact on the way social work organisations conceptualise and support practice. For example, he highlights that stories of child abuse within the media are reported as failings of the social work profession rather than as crime stories as is typical in other European countries. This he contends leads to a proceduralist approach to child protection where the relationship based aspects of the work are

marginalised and procedures are seen as the clearest and safest way of conducting the work. Munro (2011) challenges such organisational and policy responses by embracing the centrality of relationships with service users and the emotional elements of the work. This potentially provides a strong footing for social work to address the move towards managerialist approaches. Conceptually, we can draw on the work of Hochschild (1983) to understand that despite professional expectations driving the emotional *presentation*, the emotional labour required to manage the dissonance with the *felt* emotion is ongoing. In terms of this thesis it is evident that for some social workers, the messages they receive from their organisation echo the proceduralist paradigm explicitly or implicitly. For example, it was highlighted that discussing the difficult emotional elements of practice can be interpreted as a health/well-being issue organisationally, and in turn counseling services are established to explore these in a separate sphere from practice focused supports such as supervision. This reflects an organisational approach to the role of emotions in practice and is linked to the messages that social workers receive in terms of the validity and 'safety' of articulating these.

This view of emotions was evident in the results as the exploration of the emotional content of practice was often discussed in the context of difficult and/or unmanageable emotions for the individual worker. Respondents most commonly talked about emotions and supervision in relation to *how they felt*, rather than as a core element of their practice. Simply put, it was the intra

rather than the inter-personal sphere of emotions that was highlighted. This perception of the role of emotions may well underpin the organisational response of channeling the discussions of such feelings down the route of health and wellbeing. This was reflected in the results with the example from Steve who noted that counseling offered him support to 'cope' with emotions rather than explore or use them. Conceptually however, it overlooks the active element that emotions can have in the way they influence and communicate with others and the meaning our emotions have in the pursuit of our goals (professional goals in this context). Frederickson (1998) noted that the exploration of positive emotions within a relationship can encourage expansive thinking and ameliorate negative emotions. This is useful if we accept that within a supportive supervision paradigm there *will* be a need for workers to express how *they* feel generally, because it takes the focus away from the potentially peripheral health/wellbeing perspective to a more holistic and inclusive view of feelings.

Hafford-Letchfield (2009) suggests that organisations are bodies which develop rules, roles and procedures which are intended to achieve agreed goals. She identifies that a scientific approach to management has been evident in social work and uses the metaphor of a machine to illustrate how procedures can be developed to achieve goals and outcomes, at the expense of the human elements within an organisation. The results from this thesis suggest that this metaphor would be too simplistic in that there *are* positive experiences of supervision where there is space for considering the

relationship based aspects of practice. One unifying aspect of the results was the removal and/or modification of this aspect of practice in written recording. What is evident though is the variance of experience within the same organisation and the differing interpretations of the organisational ethos and culture.

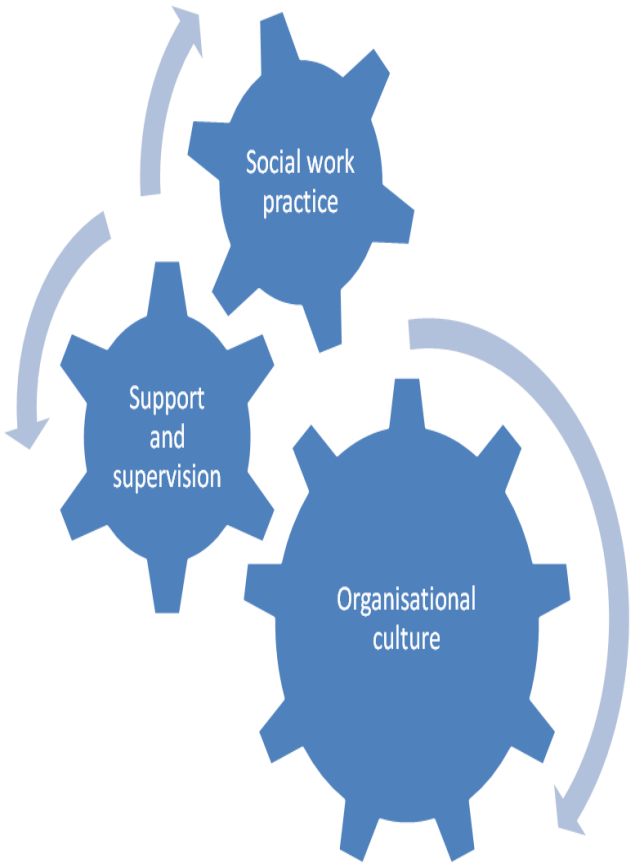

Diagram 6 – Social work organisational culture machine model

This notion of organisational culture is crucial when considering the findings of this thesis. In the diagram above I have developed and adapted the aforementioned metaphor of the organisational machine. It indicates the

relationship between organisational culture, supervision and practice. If we consider the issue of 'safety' and the articulation of emotions in supervision, it is clear that those respondents who felt it unsafe to explore emotions adapted their approach within supervision and the wider organisation to present themselves in a detached and procedural manner. This in part is a presentational issue, but the complex picture that emerged about the role of emotions within the social worker/service user relationship suggests that cultural messages cascade down to direct practice and lead to uncertainties in terms the role and validity of emotions.

9.3 – Emotions and organisational culture

SCIE (2004) proposed a range of features that underpin a *learning* organisational culture. These include:

- Teamwork
- Shared beliefs
- Innovation and mistakes
- Clear policies
- Supervision
- Leadership at all levels

These features appear to be particularly cogent when linked to the findings of this thesis as they shed light on where the apparent inconsistencies in the

experiences of social workers may lie. The idea that shared beliefs are important sits comfortably with the aforementioned view of organisations being underpinned by a shared vision. Ruch (2011) notes that the competing influences of outcomes focused public management approaches with the less measurable emotional elements of practice present social work managers with a difficult balancing act. This does not need to be a binary debate, if a cultural shift where the emotional and relationship based elements of practice are explicitly agreed and shared as important at all levels. This would be further enhanced by permitting the 'safe' exploration of practice that encourages consideration of alternative perspectives, and allows for mistakes and uncertainty to be contained. The notion of leadership at all levels chimes with the aspirations for increased professional autonomy and trust that permeate national narratives about the profession (SSSC, 2006; Munro, 2011). Bamford (1982) provides a cautionary view of the aspiration for greater professional autonomy, by emphasising that organisational factors such as resources and policy are ever present and provide both opportunities and obstacles for autonomy. This is a helpful point as it grounds any discussion about organisational culture in a realistic context.

Perhaps the idea of a reflective organisation (Morrison, 2007) is useful here as it brings in the idea of a fluid organisational structure which whilst forward looking (learning culture) also brings in a cyclical learning approach which could allow for issues such as resources and power to be constantly acknowledged and explored. Conceptually these elements are part of the

context in which individual workers will apply meanings to their emotions and regulate their expression. The model embraces these factors rather than hoping to remove them. It was a commonly expressed view from participants in the interviews in this thesis that they had not had an opportunity to consider the issues relating to emotions and practice prior to their involvement in the research. This may be a symptom of an organisational culture which has a strong managerialist flavour and one which does not focus on critical reflection. This then leads to the strong sense within the data that a social worker's ability to reflect upon and explore their practice in depth is dependant on *individual* rather than organisational approaches to support and supervision.

9.4 - Emotions and supervision

The role that supervision plays in providing social workers with a forum to explore the emotional content of their practice was something which was anticipated as being key from the outset in this thesis. The survey and interview data echoed this to an extent, but also suggested that the supervisory relationship is subject to individual styles, ethos, pressures and focus. For some, supervision was a safe and supportive forum where all aspects of practice could be explored. For others it was 'unsafe' and the focus and content of supervision steered clear of providing a forum to move beyond functional discussion of caseloads. It was not uncommon for respondents to highlight issues such as the pressure of time, the nature of

supervision paperwork and the skills of the supervisor as being pivotal factors in determining the quality and focus of supervision.

If we return to the 'machine' diagram in the previous section which illustrated the connectedness of organisational level culture and supervision, it is clear to see the connections and potential solutions. For example, a shift in organisational culture would encourage and necessitate an allocation of time and space to facilitate depth rather than surface approaches to supervision (Cooper, 2004). The development at organisational level of paperwork which guides the remit of supervision to include reflections about the relationship elements of practice would further promote a reflective culture. Finally the provision of training and support for supervisors may provide greater consistency and underpin the aforementioned shared vision required.

9.5 – Functions of supervision and the role of emotional intelligence

I have already noted the apparent inconsistency of experience across the cohort of respondents with regard to the supervision of their practice. These differences were evident across all areas of the local authority and there was a clear sense that regardless of organisational messages and arrangements for supervision there was still looseness to the interpretation and execution of supervision. When respondents talked about supervision they focused on the supervisor/supervisee dynamic as being pivotal in terms of permissions

about the content and focus of supervision. I have already noted some of the contextual issues such as time and space which influence supervision. However, it was also evident that the interpersonal dynamics between the two participants in supervision was important. I use the word 'participant' purposefully in this context, as the aforementioned messages about professional autonomy and leadership at all levels (SCIE, 2004; Munro, 2011) opens the door for considering the construction of the supervisory relationship as a partnership which is co-created. This is another area where greater congruence between the wider messages about the social work profession is required. Later in this chapter I will develop a model to support a partnership approach to the construction of the function and content of supervision.

The role of supervision is discussed within the literature review, but if we accept that social work supervision can have a managerial, supportive and educational function (Kadushin, 1985) then it becomes clearer where the balance can become unpredictable. The regular references about what social workers felt in terms of feeling 'safe' to discuss emotions may well be a symptom of the perceived power differences within the supervisory relationship and the focus on the procedural aspects of a caseload would appear to reflect a managerialist vision of supervision. The notion of an educational function of supervision sits comfortably with the preceding points about establishing a learning/reflective culture. The supportive function appears particularly vulnerable to the individual approaches to supervision

and as indicated within the data, this function can often be seen as a separate entity and can be siphoned off from the core supervisory relationship.

It was clear from the data that the management of caseloads and professional performance were key aspects of supervision. Rushton & Jack (1996) noted in relation to supervision in the context of child protection that cases perceived as emergencies and of greatest urgency tended to rise to the top of the agenda for supervision. This pressure to deal with high profile cases is understandable but should not be seen as a barrier to a more holistic approach. My view is that the discussion of the emotional content of practice should be integrated *with* the practical discussions of caseloads. My contention is that the emotional elements of practice are part of the process of practice and any discussion about a piece of work (especially cases of an urgent nature) should include these elements. This returns us to the conceptual framework and the need to recognise the constant process of emotional responses, cognition and expression. The emphasis we have placed on the impact on actions and decision-making is crucial. To not integrate this into the management of casework is to create a need for selective editing and presentation as evidenced in the results. This is echoed by Sudbery (2002) when he notes that if the relationship and emotional aspects of practice are to be valued and recognised, then supervision must adopt a therapeutic aspect to it, in the same way that counsellors and therapists would expect of their supervision arrangements

In a sense, what I am suggesting is that by presenting the purpose of supervision as containing three distinct functions, there is implicitly a boundary being placed between the functions. This can be illustrated by the example in the preceding paragraph whereby if we accept the role of emotions within social work practice, then any discussion (managerially focused or otherwise) about practice must include it. Hennessey (2011) highlights the need to consider the inter/intra personal required of social workers within practice. This presents a potential educative function for supervision and one where role modeling can be utilised. Rushton & Nathan (1996) suggest that a key skill for supervisors is the ability to role model empathy and containment within the supervisory relationship in a manner which is congruent with that of social worker/service user relationships. This moves the discussion on to consider what qualities and contexts may facilitate the removal of the aforementioned functional boundaries to allow for greater depth and consistency to supervision as envisaged by Social Work Task Force (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2009).

Hennessey (2011) notes that if we consider the lifeline of each individual social worker, then it is clear that the content and experiences of each worker will be different. This links well conceptually in terms of the internal models and somatic markers which we draw upon to make sense of events (Fridja, 1998). This in turn means that an approach to supervision which adopts a procedural approach at the expense of tuning into the 'world' of the

worker and allowing for critical reflection is limiting. However, he also notes that the process of reflection and use of self requires a lowering of private defences and in a sense requires a leap of faith and trust on the part of the worker. This links well with the need for clarity about permissions and powers and in turn the importance of an emotionally intelligent approach to supervision. Hennessey, notes that the exploration of feelings leads to reasoning about one's actions as opposed to lacking reason. This chimes well with discussions about the relationship between emotions and thought in the literature and links with the emotional awareness and attunement aspects of emotional intelligence (Rosenberg, 1990). Howe (2008) notes that in order to achieve such a reflective environment there needs to be an acceptance that social work is a complex activity with uncertainties and unknowns. Without this acceptance then social workers are pushed into an arena where a selective edited presentation of practice is undertaken in supervision.

The concept of emotional intelligence is important when considering the qualities required of both parties involved in a supervisory relationship. Emotional intelligence is a two way process within any given relationship and in the context of supervisory relationship, both parties will be tuning into the emotional responses of the other. For supervisors, this seems to be a crucial quality in terms of identifying and responding to supervisee's emotional reactions and allowing and facilitating containment and in turn exploration of emotions. If we accept the managerial element of the role, then the regulation of one's emotions as a supervisor would seem pertinent in terms

of maintaining their management role, whilst also providing a supportive and accepting environment for workers. Smith (2000) found the most common response of social workers when asked what quality their 'ideal' supervisor would have was the ability to 'be there'. This links strongly again with the empathic elements of emotional intelligence and the desirability of these qualities in supervisors. Conceptually this chimes with the active element that emotions can have in the way they influence and communicate with others and the meaning our emotions have in the pursuit of our goals (Barrett, 2012). This was not always evident in the experiences of social workers in this thesis and may point to a key area for training as identified by Social Work Task Force (Department of Children, Schools and Families 2009). The need for considering emotional intelligence among supervisors was identified within a nursing context as being a key concern as a study of supervisors noted a lack of correlation between measured emotional intelligence and leadership roles (Beauvais, Brady, O'Shea & Griffin, 2011). This raises questions about the routes that staff become supervisors and whether the qualities that lead to promotions are those required of a positive supervisor. This is a potential area for further research and enquiry in relation to social work.

9.6 – Supervision – the impact of roles

It is important to note that the supervisory role sits within a wider set of roles. For example, the casework management function of supervision can

sit alongside line-management functions in terms of staff appraisal and quality assurance. The combination of line management functions and supervisory roles are not uncommon in social work (Hafford-Letchfield, 2009) and this lends a further tension when considering the perceived sense of safety to speak about uncertain elements of one's practice or expose one's own emotional reactions. Smith (2000) vividly draws parallels between the care versus control tensions evident within social work practice and the balance between upholding the standards of the agency and the wellbeing of workers within the supervisory relationship. This is evident in the results of this thesis and provides a challenge for considering what can be learnt from the findings.

I will firstly consider the multiplicity of roles that supervisors may hold, and examine more closely the separating of the supervision function from line management responsibilities and/or the agency itself. I will then move on to consider a model which may be used to work within the existing arrangements common to social work agencies and one which allows for greater clarity and compatibility of the various strands of supervision.

Beddoe (2010) examines the role of supervision within the context of risk. She contends that the management of risk often leads to social work practice being reduced to a series of procedures and indicators that overlook the complexity of the reality of practice. This phenomenon is of course challenged by Munro (2011) in terms of being too narrow and constrictive a

view of practice. Beddoe goes on to look at an example of supervision in New Zealand whereby the social workers are given supervision from someone external to the agency. This chimes with the experiences of some respondents in this thesis who identified outsourced counseling as being a safer environment to explore the emotional aspects of practice. Beddoe (2010) makes links with the need for trust to encourage meaningful reflection, and that this is more easily achieved when there is a clear sense of the role of the supervisor which is not conflated with line management, quality assurance and organisationally driven roles.

There are limitations to such a view as noted in the results section, due to the creation of an even more stark separation between the agency and the reality of reflective relationship based practice. If we recall the example from Steve who noted that despite the value he placed on externally sourced counseling support, he found it very difficult to bring any learning or ideas back into his own practice as a deeper separation had developed. Beddoe (2010) notes the potential for mixed messages in terms of agency policy and in turn questions about where the accountability and responsibility for practice may lie. The potential for a blaming culture and an anti-agency outcome from supervision of this type was also evident. Ruch (2011) highlights the potential for the projection of anxieties within a supervision relationship. This relates to the phenomenon where workers may blame supervisors for lacking support due to their own anxieties. Given an

outsourced supervisory relationship, or a dual supervisory approach, this may be exacerbated and less manageable for workers and supervisors.

The above discussion highlights that supervisors continue to have a balancing act of functions and roles whether orientated within a line management type structure or in a system where there is a separation of roles and/or agency. Due to this, and a belief that the emotional and relationship based aspects of social work practice are integral to any genuine exploration and supervision of practice, I would argue for developing an approach that helps achieve balance, safety and clarity within a supervisory relationship.

9.7 – A partnership model and tool for supervision

Jindal-Snape & Ingram (2012) developed a model of supervision for international doctoral students which sought to encourage and facilitate a partnership approach to supervision which allowed both parties to clarify the balance and nature of the expected supervision relationship and in turn adjust and modify it accordingly. I wish to take this model as a starting point and develop it further within the context of social work supervision and give particular focus to the place that the articulation of emotions have within it.

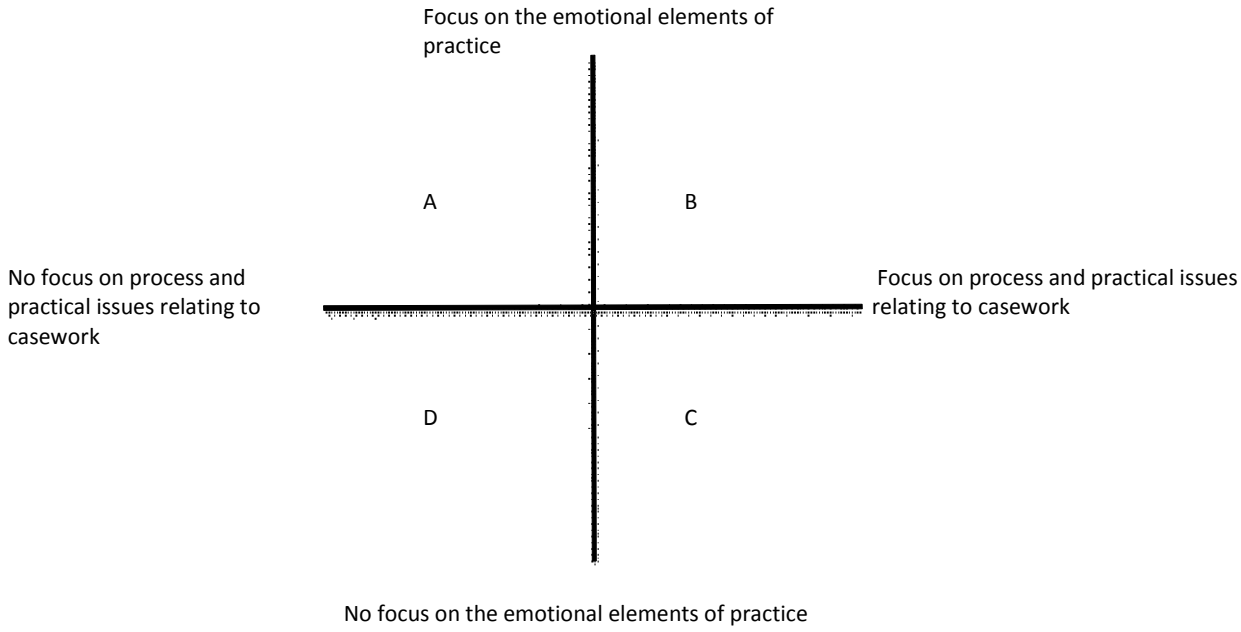

Diagram 7 – Adapted from Supervision Remit Compatibility (SuReCom) Model for supervision (Jindal-Snape & Ingram 2012)

The above model is intended as a visual illustration of where the balance of supervision can be negotiated and also as a *tool* for co-constructing and reviewing the balance and content of supervision. This dual function of the model is crucial in terms of its application as it acknowledges the dynamic and fluid nature of supervisory relationships. It should also be noted at this point that the model is adaptable across a range of supervisory debates. I have chosen the balance between the practical and emotional aspects of casework, but equally it could be about a balance between reflective approaches and a technical/rational approach. One can plot the degree to which a facet of supervision is relevant at any point on both axes. This

allows for both parties to plot their own expectations and aspirations in terms of supervision. In relation to this thesis the model was further developed and adapted and I identified 4 key aspects of it:

- **Aspiration** – the use of this model would allow for each party to plot where they would hope the balance of supervision would lie.
- **Negotiation** – having plotted the aspirational balance, any divergence in view can be explored and discussed
- **Agreement** – the model can then be used to reach an agreed balance, which can be linked to organisational and national perspectives.
- **Review** – the model can be revisited at any stage to consider whether the agreement is still valid or is requiring adjustment.

In the case of the example above we can see that quadrant A depicts a supervisory relationship which focuses on the emotional aspects of practice but with less of a focus on practical casework. This may represent something closer to the aforementioned out-sourced counseling, albeit that context had a limited emotional well-being focus. Quadrant B represents a balance between the emotional and practical elements of casework and would reflect a supervisory relationship where both elements are seen as valid and appropriate. Quadrant C depicts a supervisory relationship where the practical elements of casework take centre stage, as reflected in the experiences of some of the social workers represented in the data. Finally,

quadrant D shows a supervisory relationship which does not focus on the practical nor the emotional aspects of practice. It is difficult to envisage such a supervisory approach, although this would reflect a lack of supervisory support.

The diagram below clarifies the potential use of this model further by illustrating where a supervisor and supervisee may differ in their expectations.

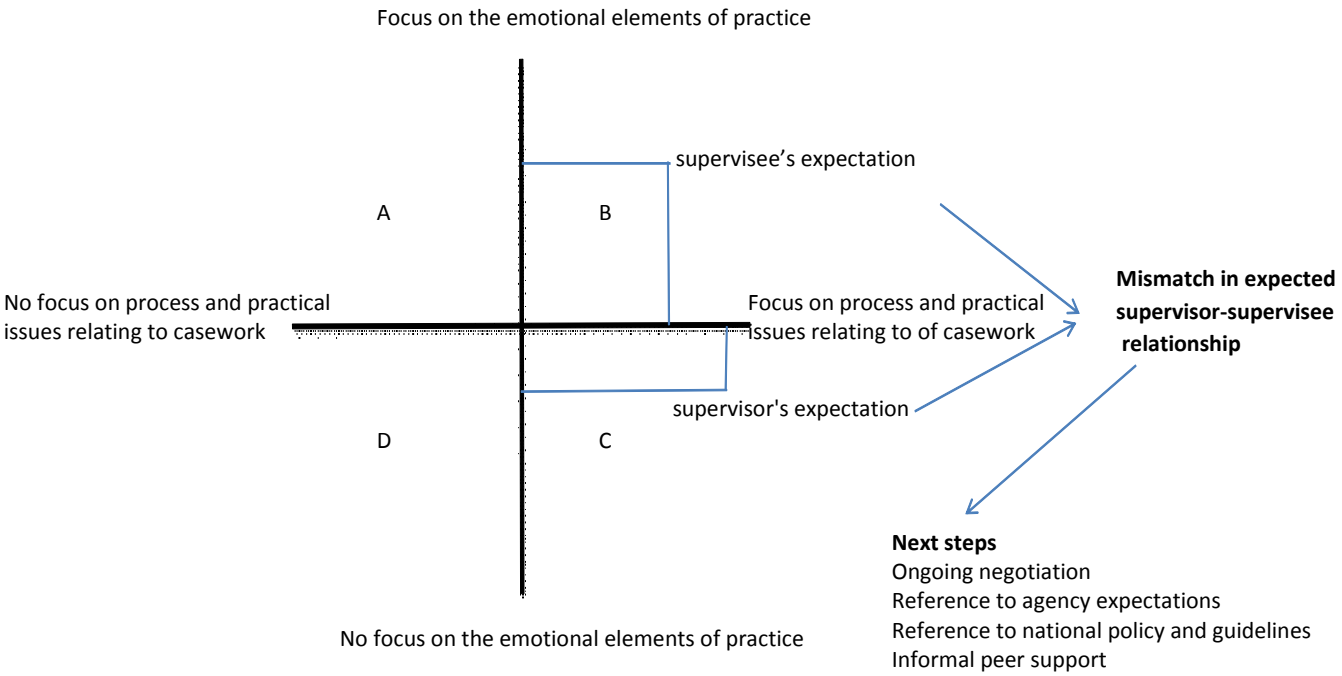

Diagram 8 - Example of a mismatch in expectations between supervisor and supervisee (adapted from Jindal-Snape & Ingram, 2012)

It is clear from the above diagram that the supervisee seeks an integration of the emotional and the practical elements of the caseload, whilst the supervisor favours a practical focus. Conceptually it is useful, as it recognises emotions as an important and influential aspect of practice and presents at the very least a trigger for exploring it as a facet of the experience and actions within practice. What is also useful about this model is the flexibility allowed in terms of plotting at any point on an axis to indicate the intensity anticipated. In the case of the supervisor their lack of willingness to engage in the emotional aspects of practice is less than their enthusiasm for the practical elements. This lends further information to any ensuing discussion. I have included a guide to potential sources of advice and support should there be a mismatch in the diagram under 'next steps'. These suggestions point to existing policy, codes and narratives relating to the profession as a means to re-clarify and underpin any ongoing negotiations. Additionally, both parties of the supervisory relationship may seek to map their aspirations against agency policy and expectations. The final suggestion relates to the use of informal supports to allow for the exploration of emotions, and it is this area that I will turn to now.

9.8 - Emotions and informal support

A key finding from this thesis was the role that informal support and contact with peers had in terms of discussing the emotional elements of practice. The key aspects of this source of support and guidance included the following

- **Shared expertise** – discussing issues with peers who have similar experiences and can 'tune in' to the circumstances and share practice wisdom
- **Unrecorded** – the idea that informal contact was not minuted nor recorded allowed for greater sense of freedom to explore complex issues and also contributed to a sense of 'safety'.
- **Accessible** – it was noted that this type of support was available 'on the spot' as often it is people that work closely to you within an office space.
- **Preparation** – allows for an exploration of issues prior to a more formal presentation of one's practice in forums such as supervision or casenotes.

The notion of informal support is, by definition, vulnerable to challenges in terms of availability, quality and accountability. Depending on one's team and the configuration of one's work space, the opportunities and desirability of such opportunities will vary. The importance of the findings of this thesis is that it gives a positive indication of the potential benefits of informal support. It is difficult to know to what extent the attractiveness of peer support is related to the nature of supervision that social workers receive. It could be argued however that the benefits of shared experience and the informality of the support would remain an asset for workers regardless of the quality and content of their supervisory relationships.

Kinman & Grant (2011) note the role that peer support can have in building the resilience of social workers and their associated stress management capabilities. They argue that the greater the breadth and depth of support mechanisms available to social workers the more beneficial it can be. This ties in nicely with the more limited conception of emotions and social work being about health and well-being in that this can be proactively addressed 'in-house' informally and formally rather than siphoned off in a reactive manner outside of core agency activities. Gilgun & Sharma (2012) highlight the potential use of humour as a way of ameliorating stress but also as a means of allowing workers to stand back from their practice and then return to it with a problem solving focus. The research interest in the role of humour in social work support and practice is in its infancy but sits comfortably with the value placed on informal support from colleagues as indicated in this thesis. Hafford-Letchfield (2009) notes that learning cultures consist of formal and informal arenas. Earlier in this chapter I discussed the desirability of developing and cascading a sense of a learning/reflective culture from an organisational level. If we accept that informal and unplanned support can be part of this wider ethos, then we can begin to stake a claim for a greater visibility and value being placed on this area of support and guidance for social workers.

There were isolated examples of quasi-formal mentoring schemes within teams in the data, which in some senses reflects an embracement of the

informal elements of support. These schemes (as described by respondents) allowed for an 'on request' style support from pre-matched mentors. This quasi-formality may compromise some of the immediacy of peer support described above and might also raise doubts about the unrecorded aspects that were valued in informal support. I would argue that such schemes may be useful in terms of adding to the overall breadth of support and guidance available to workers, but should not compromise or reduce the importance of addressing the centrality of emotions and the relationship based aspects of practice within supervision and the wider organisational culture.

A final point that seems worth considering in terms of further research and thought, is the potential for social work organisations to consider the physical environments they provide for staff. This may involve providing physical spaces that allow for the immediacy, unrecorded and shared experience element of informal support to be harnessed and enhanced. This would require such spaces to be located in a manner which is *not* akin to private meeting rooms (as that is not how informal contact was described in the data), rather that spaces that allow workers with shared knowledge and experience to come into contact with each other naturally within their workspace. Bolton and Boyd (2003) noted that in the context of flight attendants, the unmanaged informal areas of the job, both social and environmental, helped workers achieve a balance between organisational culture and their individually experienced emotions. This may be seen to be true in the views of social workers in this thesis, whereby informal supports

from colleagues allow for distancing and perspective within an organisational context. The findings from this thesis may contribute to raising the profile of informal supports and in turn provide a catalyst for such developments.

9.9 – Conclusion

This chapter has brought into focus the wider context in which the emotional aspects of practice exist and can be supported. The 'machine' based model emphasised the interplay between organisational culture, supervision and practice. This model builds on the variable picture emerging in the data regarding the experience of working in social work teams and the formal and informal opportunities for exploring the emotional aspects of practice that this affords.

The proposal of a partnership model for developing a co-created agreement about the content and focus of supervision seeks to reduce the apparent inconsistency around support and reflection. A crucial aspect of this model is the responsibility and involvement of the individual social worker, the supervisor and the organisational culture to agree and explore the desired focus and balance of supervision. This is particularly pertinent if we return to the notion that these elements are meshed within a wider system as portrayed in the machine based model.

Chapter 10- Discussion - Emotions and the social work professional

10.1 – Introduction

A key theme emerging from the data were the recurrent references to the notion of "being professional" when discussing the role of emotions within practice. The word 'professional' was often presented as an uncomfortable construct which placed barriers, boundaries and uncertainties around the role of emotions. The issue of the professional profile of social work was not directly targeted within the survey, yet respondents viewed (perhaps quite understandably) the questions about the role that emotions may have within their practice as being directly rooted in their individual and organisational constructs of what it means to be a social work professional. Despite the complex picture that emerged in the data regarding the role of emotions, it was notable that 90.7% of respondents agreed that *"emotions are compatible with being a social work professional"*. In this chapter I wish to locate these findings within the current social work landscape, and seek to make conclusions in response to the aforementioned view about the compatibility of emotions in the profession of social work.

10.2 - Emotions and visions of the social work profession

The social work profession continues to grapple with its own identity and function (Munro, 2011; Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2009; Scottish Executive, 2006). There are many influences on the evolution of the social work profession including government policy, legislation, knowledge, regulation, media representation, training, economics and the wider multi-disciplinary context. This is not unique to social work, but the references to current visions of the profession earlier in this paragraph reflect an active and essential need for social work to refine and re-examine itself as an activity and a profession. The Munro Report (Munro, 2011) highlighted the impact of managerialist approaches in terms of reducing the autonomy and value of the expertise of social workers. The report suggested that workers felt that they were not safe (a strong link to the theme of safety that emerged in this thesis) to make decisions autonomously and the presence of a strong managerial culture of supervision, regulation and monitoring further impacted on the spiral towards a technical/rational reality of the profession. Munro (2011) goes on to highlight explicitly the emotional content of practice in child protection and suggests that not only is this inescapable but it is a core element of the social work professional's role in terms of establishing relationships and contributing to assessments. Ruch (2011) notes that this is echoed by the Social Work Task Force (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2009) with a call for social work managers and supervisors to be

trained and supported to manage and explore the emotions of their workers. She identifies the tension between this message and the current reality of practice.

Stanford (2010) provides a useful commentary on the impact of what he terms the 'risk society'. The term 'risk society' as discussed by Giddens (1999) refers to a society which is focused on controlling future events and as such is focused on the risk factors that may impact upon it. Stanford (2010) suggests that this has led to a preoccupation with safety, which has put pressure on social work to view service users through a lens of risk/safety and dangerousness/vulnerability. This leads to a boundary between worker and service user which undermines the relationship based aspects of practice and promotes the idea that social workers had 'better get it right' to avoid negative consequences. This feeds into the aforementioned culture which can lead social workers into relying on procedures and policies to guide their practice, and in turn not feeling safe or permitted to use and explore the emotional relationship aspects of the work. This has direct links with the findings of this thesis relating to the messages of 'safety' in terms of articulating the emotional aspects of practice, and the complex and often apparently contradictory views on the role of emotions in terms of the social work relationship. What *is* clear from my results is that social workers do establish relationships with service users and that these are often undertaken autonomously and as such can't exist fully within the confines of an organisational culture or framework. This is picked up by Ferguson (2010)

when he vividly described the autonomous daily activities of a social worker and how these are inevitably underpinned by individual emotions, knowledge and experience. Ferguson notes that the sights, sounds, and smells of these activities remain at a distance from much of the discussion of social work practice, yet is at the core of it. This echoes the conceptual framework in the sense that the cues which individuals draw upon are diverse and will include previous experiences, prevailing cultures and unconscious responses (Rosenberg, 1990; Turner and Stets, 2005). It also chimes with the notion that social constructionism is multi-layered and that the existence of public and private spheres both have a role to play in emotional expression, and that emotional labour occurs when there is dissonance between the two.

Ruch (2011) highlights a key debate within social work which is echoed in the findings from this thesis; namely the balance between the technical/rational and the relationship based elements of the profession. She notes that the increasingly managerialist nature of the profession has sought to view the activities of social workers as straightforward and linear, and in turn reducible to explicit processes, procedures and outcomes. This she argues and the results from this thesis concur, is not the reality of the complex and human activity of social work practice.

Gorman (2000) spoke of the '3 Es' of the managerialist orientated construct of the profession: **E**conomy, **E**fficiency and **E**ffectiveness. Rogers (2001) made a call for a fourth 'e' to be added – **E**motion. Rogers suggested that

bureaucratic organisations do not actually remove emotions, but merely suppress and disguise them. This is echoed throughout my results in the numerous examples of managing, removing and simply not recording or discussing the emotional aspects of practice. I would suggest that for the aforementioned managerialist construct of the profession to have a foot in the reality of practice and the inescapably human elements within it, requires the fourth 'e' to be added to provide balance. The use of the word balance is pivotal to my thesis, as the results clearly show that there *are* key areas of policy, process and knowledge which guide the practice of social workers, but that the relationship with service users and the emotional content of this must be seen as compatible rather than at odds with each other. The conceptual framework at the foundations of this thesis underline that emotions are an intrinsic part of how individuals make sense of their world and determine associated behaviors. This adds further weight to the inescapably crucial element of the 4th 'e', because to organisationally exclude them simply removes a crucial and very present aspect of social work from vision (rather than reality). Later in this chapter I will develop a model of the profession which will strive to facilitate its inclusion.

10.3 - Social construction and the presentation of emotions

This discussion takes me to the issue of professional presentation, which was a key finding from my results. What emerged was a sense that the context described above had a significant impact on the ways that social workers presented themselves and in particular the emotional aspects of their practice, in different forums. The results showed that social workers found it difficult to establish a coherent sense of where emotions sat within their work. This complex picture existed within direct practice with service users in terms of the balance between sharing and expressing emotions and maintaining professional roles and associated boundaries. It existed within the arena of supervision in terms of the perceived permissions about the role and nature of emotions within practice and support. It was never more starkly reflected in the absence of the articulation of emotions within written recordings. Finally, it was very evident in the references to what it meant to be 'professional'. It may be pertinent here to remind ourselves of the notion of '*professional emotions'* suggested by Simone and the '*professional face'* suggested by Hazel. Both these ideas were borne out of the tussle between the reality of practice and how one may be emotionally experiencing it, and the perceived expectations and requirements of being a social work professional.

This complex picture varies in nature depending on context and role and this pushes the discussion of emotions towards a broader sociological arena rather than purely considering the emotional content of social work practice as being individually managed, felt and expressed. This chimes with the socially constructed aspects of my conceptual framework (Turner and Stets, 2005; Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Hochschild, 1983). The issue of 'safety' expressed by social workers is a good example of the impact that systemic and/or organisational cultural messages can have on the role and status of emotions within practice. If we consider emotions through the lens of social constructionism, we can see that the culture and norms of agencies, local authorities, professional codes and narratives present opportunities and challenges for the emotional experience and expression of social work practice. This is reflected in many ways within the data. For example, the discussion about the importance of the approach of supervisors to the interpretation of the role of supervision, illustrates how this then sets the backdrop for how social workers feel about the support they receive and in turn their ability to articulate their emotions. This further underlines that our own individual responses and the cultural cues which impact upon them are also located within an interpersonal context (note the impact of the interpretation of supervision by the supervisors). When the articulation of emotions are viewed through the social construction lens, it can be seen that the relationship between the emotional content of practice and the perceived cultural messages about its appropriateness lead to difficulties in terms of expression and recording. This interface (culture and emotion) is a crucial

aspect of my conceptual framework, and the disjuncture felt by social workers in my thesis (or indeed congruence in some cases) between the emotional aspects of their practice and constructs of professionalism and/or supervision impacted on their experience and presentation of the emotional content of their practice is evidence of this in practice. It is clear to see the synergies between this tension and the messages from Munro (2011) in relation to the need for greater congruence between the emotional reality of practice and the organisational validation of it. Simply put, when there is a lack of congruence between the cultural messages about appropriate behaviour and what one feels, a tension is created which leads to a need to consider one's professional *presentation*.

10.4 - Dramaturgical approach to emotions and social work

The idea that social workers 'present' themselves and their practice in ways that respond to and interact with the context in which they operate is a recurring theme within the results, and was a key aspect of the conceptual framework of emotions that underpins this thesis. The results show that social workers navigated their way through the cultural and professional context in different ways and within different arenas. The broad range of forums identified by respondents which impacted on the nature of their emotional expression was evidence of the multiplicity of contexts which may impact a worker across their working day.

Hochschild's ideas can be further linked to the findings of this thesis if we consider the dramaturgical ideas discussed by Turner and Stets (2005). The term dramaturgical clearly has its basis within the sphere of drama. It allows one to consider the way people behave and feel within a metaphorical arena that takes the idea of 'acting' into the familiar context of theatre and stage. In a sense this allows one to provide a clear framework to view the social construction of any given context of practice. It links conceptually, to the notion that emotions are experienced, appraised and expressed. The expression is the aspect which is particularly influenced by prevailing norms and cultures, yet the private and internal sphere of emotional experience are also at play. I have taken this thinking as a starting point and have developed it in relation to this thesis and social work practice. It helps to create a fluid model which illustrates the pressures on how social workers present themselves in different contexts.

The following table provides an illustration of this dramaturgical interpretation of 'professional presentation' in social work. I will use the example from Hazel in section 3.7 which highlighted her attunement with a service user (Gary) who reminded her of her younger brother. I will use this as a basis, and will use my 'dramatic licence' to fill in the gaps of my knowledge about the case to fully develop this model. The focus is on Hazel as the practitioner and I seek to illustrate the social construction of the context in which she 'presents' as a professional social worker.

The Script	Context – Hazel is involved in working directly with a 15 year old boy to examine and address his offending behavior. This work is set within a clear statutory context and she will report to the Children's Hearing System. Plot – Hazel feels a connection with Gary due to his similarity to her brother. She finds herself worrying more about this service user and feels motivated to 'go the extra mile' to help him and get the services he needs.
The Venue	The contact between them usually takes place on a one to one basis in a local community building, though they also meet at a local café sometimes. Hazel also talks about her practice in supervision and speaks about her involvement and recommendations at the Children's Hearing.
The Actors	Lead roles - Hazel, Gary, Gary's Family, Hazel's supervisor, Children's Panel. Supporting cast – Hazel's team and agency, Hazel's family, Hazel's caseload, Gary's school, Gary's friends, the local community and the Scottish Government.
The Language	Hazel has to adopt a range of approaches to language according to context. For example, she is keen to avoid jargon and tries to speak in a warm and friendly manner to Gary to help establish their relationship. She needs to articulate the reasons for her actions and recommendations to her supervisor. She also will need to present her assessment in a manner that is accessible to Gary and his family at the panel. She also has a supportive colleague at the next table with whom she often discusses how she feels about different cases.
The Roles	Hazel is a social worker for a youth justice team. She works with Gary who is subject to a compulsory supervision order due to his offending behaviour. Hazel receives supervision from her line manager who has a responsibility to oversee her caseload and support her as a member of staff. The Scottish Government set the national social work agenda and contribute to the vision of the profession. The rest of the cast have varying degrees of impact and involvement but add to the context of the practice. Hazel also brings her 'self' into her practice which is shaped by a range of factors including her own relationship experiences.
The Audience	For Hazel, all the parties noted above form a part of the audience. Unlike the theatre, she 'performs' to these audiences separately and together at different times.
The Editing Process	Hazel will adjust and edit her communication and recording in different ways. She will report to her supervisor what she feels to be the relevant points about the case. She will write a report that explains her view of the case and her recommendations to the Children's Hearing. She will also feed back to Gary and his family her views of the situation at a range of points.

Table 34- Dramaturgical presentation of social work practice

In Table 34 I have laid out the key elements of the case that Hazel described in her interview. The purpose of this approach is to locate the practice and the role of emotions within a clearer context. In isolation, it is difficult to ascertain why and where Hazel may chose a particular professional presentation. However in this model it is possible to see that her positive attunement to Gary is a useful aide when engaging with him and establishing a relationship. The presence of influential policies such as Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) (Scottish Executive, 2007) provides an encouraging message about establishing open and positive relationships with young people to seek their views and provides a congruence in this forum. This has direct links to the interpersonal aspects of emotions within my framework, and the purposeful edge that emotions can have on our behaviour and the impact we wish to have on others. In turn, these emotions have a direct impact (possibly at the expense of other people on her caseload) on her motivation to achieve positive results. Hypothetically, Gary may have met with Hazel on a twice weekly basis and been fast-tracked on to a youth project for young people to work with motorcycles. Hazel would be required to articulate how she practiced and how outcomes were reached. She will have drawn on a range of sources within her practise that may include knowledge of child development, attachment theory and groupwork theory. In addition, opportunities to reflect both formally and informally would allow Hazel to examine her previous personal experiences and consider their impact on her appraisal and actions within the case. However, the

presentation of her emotional reaction to Gary may be presented very differently within supervision, where Gary's case would need to be located in relation to her wider caseload and that of her team. It is at this stage that Hazel may need to seek a technical/rational interpretation of her practice at the expense of the significant role of the emotional content and the quality of her relationship (deep acting). This would be even more the case when writing about Gary in a report. This would require deep acting on one level in response to messages about what constitutes robust professional decision making, but arguably surface acting in that the omission of emotions from the report could constitute an attempt to make people think you feel one thing when you actually feel another.

The focus of her supervision and the content of her reports are linked to the aforementioned managerialist approaches to practice which seek clear recordable processes and outcomes. This context pushes the drama and the plot into places where it wouldn't otherwise have gone had Hazel been able to explore and record the emotional impact of this case. To push this metaphorical model further, it is clear that the highly valued informal contact with her colleague constitutes a sub-plot which helps to manage the disjuncture experienced by Hazel when juggling competing pressures on the way she should act. Goffman (1983) has a dramaturgical edge to his 'model of interaction' and helpfully suggests that the 'venue' that I propose is crucial in terms of catergorisation. He suggests that we place environments into categories such as informal, private and fun in order to direct the way we

present ourselves. Crucially, he emphasises that such a view of interaction is cyclical, fluid and bi-directional. In this sense, everyone involved in the case above (or indeed any social work case) are all actors responding to the rules, norms, and cultures of *their* environment. This would suggest that Goffman's model is multi-directional in this case. In my view this leads us back to a resounding emphasis about the centrality of the blurry human elements of social work practice and the implausibility of being able to reduce it to a technical/rational activity. This again is rooted in the conceptual framework, in that emotions are core aspect of the ways in which we understand and act in response to events and stimuli. The danger of not recognising this is that social workers may be forced to provide the equivalent of the fixed smile of a flight attendant rather than being able to operate within a professional construct that allows for deeper emotional depth and clarity.

The use of such a dramaturgical approach is in my view applicable to all the contexts of social work practice. There will be of course differences in the cast members and associated plots, but the central focus on the social construction of emotions and how they are used and communicated would remain. Rosenberg (1990) notes the importance of reflexivity in terms of one's emotional responses to aide the development of self-knowledge and consequently informs one's actions. I would argue that the dramaturgical approach illustrated above has applicability as a *tool* to examine practice situations and encourage reflection in addition to its use as a way of unpicking the phenomenon of professional presentation.

10.5 - Emotions and professional ethics

The previous discussion provides a clear sense of the contextual factors that may impact on the emotional elements of practice and their presentation and communication within it. A core aspect of this thesis has been to focus on the experience of individual workers and their own personal emotional responses. I will return to the construct of emotional intelligence in the next section of this chapter before pulling these psychological and sociological strands together to construct a model of the social work profession which locates emotions with greater clarity. One area that merits discussion on route to this goal is that of the ethical issues that have emerged within this thesis.

The results reflected the complex struggle that social workers had in terms of articulating the place that emotions have within their practice. Part of the struggle lies in the technical/rational debates explored above, whilst another aspect is about workers striving to do what is ethically 'right' in their practice. This can be explicitly linked deontologically to the Codes of Practice (SSSC, 2003) which set out an ethical framework and purpose for the profession. The central tenets of this are as follows:

Social service workers must:

- *Protect the rights and promote the interests of service users and carers*
- *Strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers*
- *Promote the independence of service users while protecting them as far as possible from danger or harm*

- *Respect the rights of service users whilst seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people*
- *Uphold public trust and confidence in social services*
- *Be accountable for the quality of their work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills.*

SSSC (2009:3)

Kant (1964) suggests that deontological approaches to actions rely on following moral rules. The codes listed above are in essence the moral rules that underpin social work and in turn impact on the way workers practice and feel about their practice. This has clear links with the social constructionist elements of the conceptual framework. Critics of deontology point to the lack of flexibility and the omission of the wider pressures and influences that may guide actions, and indeed the individual interpretation and commitment to moral rules. This mirrors the point I made earlier in this chapter in that the results of this thesis underline the multiplicity of cultural and individual influences on any given situation.

If we continue to use the practice example from the previous section, it is clear that Hazel's attunement to Gary was utilised to establish a trusting relationship. The aforementioned discussion about how she presents the impact of her emotional response to Gary creates a tension when she seeks to achieve the accountability required of her. The key issue here is that without the opportunity to explore and record the content and nature of her relationship with Gary, she is pushed towards an outward 'act' of upholding the Codes of Practice in a rather selective manner. I am not suggesting that this example reflects any contravention of the codes, merely that if social

workers are not clear about the permissibility of emotions and their relationship with service users, then the usability of Codes of Practice are compromised. It is worth noting the centrality of the social work relationship within the codes above, which indicates that they (despite interpretation and other external influences) place a clear value on the engagement and interaction elements of practice

Houston (2011) points to *virtue ethics* and *care ethics* as being congruent and helpful when considering the blurry aspects of social work relationships and practice. Virtue ethics refer to one's approach coming from one's own character and being. This relies on a social worker's ethical approach being intrinsic to them. This requires self-knowledge and ongoing reflection and supervision to foster and manage it. This echoes Smith and Lorentzon's (2005) findings in the context of nursing that the motivation to enter the profession was in part due to the congruence of the professional codes and one's own values. In this thesis it was clear that for some social workers the opportunity to engage in the reflection necessary to unpick such issues did not always exist. This may reduce the willingness and 'safety' for workers to develop the kind of autonomous practice purported by Munro (2011). Care ethics is a relationship based ethical approach which places an emphasis on actions being guided by the views and needs of the service user. This approach chimes with the codes of practice and much policy and legislation (SSSC, 2009; Munro, 2011; Children (Scotland) Act 1995). Houston (2011) builds on the care ethics work of Sevenhuijsen (1998) by marrying the

rational/cerebral (head) aspects of relationship based ethics with the emotional and empathetic (heart) elements. In addition to these two elements, he adds the practical approaches adopted by social workers (hands) and the motivation that workers have to care (feet). In the results there is a vivid practice example from a criminal justice social worker called Pete. He provides an account of the internal ethical struggle he manages when working with a sex offender who does not take responsibility for their offences. He acknowledges feelings of anger and the potential this can have for him to misuse his power. This tension is resolved for him by adopting an approach which recognises the service user holistically and in doing so is able to manage his emotions and understand the motivations of the service user. This reflects the use of the self-knowledge and the emotional intelligence aspects of my conceptual framework. The construct of care ethics proposed above can help us understand what guided Pete's actions and management of the emotional response within his practice. In the text box below I have made links between Pete's practice and this model.

Head – ability to draw on knowledge (motivational interviewing) and policy (holistic practice) to contextualise his feelings and to consider issues of power.

Heart – a willingness to manage his emotions and establish a relationship that values the views and perspectives of the service user.

Hands – the use of motivational interviewing and role modeling in his practice.

Feet – using the recognition of his professional value base as a motivation to persevere and treat his service user with respect.

This is a useful contribution to understanding the findings of this thesis as it creates an ethical space for social workers to detangle the complex location of emotions within their practice. By looking at this ethical approach through the lens of this thesis, it is possible to see the centrality of the relationship between the emotional content of practice and professional ethics of social work. For the autonomous relationship based aspiration of the profession to be achieved, the care ethics approach must be adopted explicitly. This is crucial for social workers to feel they have the *permissions* to explore and respond to the emotional elements of their relationships with service users. This requires a support system that allows for reflection and articulation of these elements of practice. This was clearly not always evident in the experiences of the social workers in this thesis who reported that their own internal reflective approaches were compromised by wider messages about what constitutes professional decision making.

This links very strongly with the key theme of this chapter which is about what it is to be a social work professional in relation to emotions. The strength of considering and adopting such an ethical approach, allows for emotions to be used within the social work relationship and used within the decisions that occur from this relationship. Perhaps most crucially, the status this affords the emotional elements of practice may lead to the explicit recording of these elements in the oral and written articulation of practice rather than being omitted, overlooked and undervalued.

10.6 – Conceptual framework revisited

The first chapter of the literature review looked at the landscape of research and thinking relating to the concept of emotions. It was noted that conceptually emotions are contested and have a range of constituent elements and processes. It would be useful to restate this framework at this stage for clarity and convenience of reference:

- *The contribution from neuroscience discussed in this chapter highlights the central role of the brain in terms of providing immediate responses and secondary processes of reasoning and cognition. These processes involve the appraisal of both physiological symptoms of arousal and an assessment of cues and context from experience.*
- *Emotions arise in response to significant events and stimuli. The meaning and significance that we attach to these events is crucial in determining both the felt and expressed emotion. These judgements are in part an internal process based on the conscious personal scripts and constructs, and unconscious memories and evolved responses. These responses are also influenced, channelled and constrained by wider social norms, cultures and expectations which impact on the perceived significance of events. The outcome of such judgements will determine subsequent actions and behaviors.*

- *Emotions also have an expressive aspect. They are inter and intra personal phenomena that are expressed and displayed between people. Such expressions of emotions also sit within a wider context of influences which can, to an extent, determine what is perceived to be appropriate, purposeful and expected. Within this, there may be a divergence from internally experienced emotions and those which are expressed. This socially constructed viewpoint is tempered by an acceptance that emotions, both unconscious and conscious, are inherently individual phenomena and are characterised by subjectivities and meanings within the private world of an individual.*
- *In the context of this thesis, the preceding cornerstones of the conceptual framework will also be considered in relation to the construct of emotional intelligence. This will allow emotions to be linked with greater clarity to the awareness, management, attunement and empathic aspects of the social work role. It will act as a means of locating emotions within a pro-active relationship-based paradigm, yet with recognition of the wider professional context in which social workers operate.*

I have referred to this framework throughout the thesis as a means of giving a theoretical and definitional context to the themes that emerged from my enquiry. Each aspect of the framework was touched on at some point within this thesis and as such proved to be a useful touchstone when making sense of the data. I have covered the linkages with the data in depth in the

preceding chapters, but it may be useful at this point to summarise how the framework fared.

A key area of resonance was the impact of organisational and professional culture on the emotional experience, meaning and expression of social work practice. There was very strong evidence that social workers valued the interpersonal relationships with service users and noted in particular the empathetic elements of these relationships. This maps very usefully onto the conceptual framework in that it highlights that need for the emotional attunement, communication and influence which characterise positive relationships (Hennessey, 2011; Ingram, 2012).

Social workers were able to give numerous examples of where they drew from their own personal experiences consciously as cues in terms of how to make sense of situations and/or respond accordingly. The unconscious elements of emotions were also noted, with particular reference to the experience of gut feeling and intuition. These aspects of emotions were found to be usefully explored and uncovered through reflection (Rosenberg, 1990). A key finding from this thesis was the variability in terms of the forums in which this reflection would take place. Informal contact with peers was the most commonly cited forum, with the formal arena of supervision being important but subject to varying degrees of perceived permissions to explore the emotional aspects of practice. These findings when viewed through the lens of the conceptual framework pointed to the influence of the

aforementioned professional norms and culture. This echoed the work of Hochschild (1983) in that messages that workers receive regarding the appropriate expression of emotion can determine the presentation of emotions regardless of the felt emotion. This tension was most often linked to notions of 'safety' and 'professionalism'. I have noted in this thesis that one of the cornerstones of this tension is the balance between the proceduralist constructs of practice and the relationship based ones. The role of procedures also adds to the cues that social workers look to when considering how to interpret circumstances they confront in practice. This chimes with the appraisal elements of the framework and broadens out the contextual influences to appraisal as well as action and expression.

Perhaps the starkest aspect of the expression and communication of the emotional elements of practice was in the removal or editing of these elements from the written recording of practice. Taken at face value, the written recording of social work practice would suggest that social work is a largely technical rational pursuit in which emotions are managed to the extent that they do not contribute to the direction, intensity or content of practice. If this was the case, then my conceptual framework would be found seriously wanting, and indeed the plethora of research into emotions would be put into question. But, crucially, that was not what social workers were saying about their practice. What was evident was the apparent tension between the role of emotions (particularly in terms of decision-making) and what was perceived to be required professionally. Again, we can see the

private and public facets of emotion within the framework emerging with clarity. It was not that social workers do not experience, understand or express their emotions, but that they *present* these in a manner which is perceived to meet the norms and consensus of the profession. This is of course challenged by current narratives such as Munro (2011). Another interesting aspect to this finding was that in terms of the conceptual framework, the editing of emotions moved away from the metaphorical frozen smile of Hochschild's flight attendants to something which was much more akin to a conscious removal of emotions at some distance after the actual event.

The vivid example in the preceding section of this chapter from the social worker Pete pulled together some key strands of my conceptual framework. The example encompassed his individual emotional reactions to a service user and his ability to manage these emotions and yet draw upon them to contribute to his chosen course of action. He was able to draw upon professional codes in tandem with his own individual responses (within the moment of the practice and after subsequent reflection) and in doing so was able to find the space for the internal and external aspects of my framework for emotions. Pete was able to operate in an emotionally intelligent manner. He was able to acknowledge his own strong feelings about the lack of responsibility shown by the service users and reflexively use this awareness to help him manage his responses within the relationship. This in turn helped him treat the service user with respect and tune into their emotional

world. This is a powerful integration of emotional intelligence and practice within a difficult context. Pete noted that this process would *not* be recorded and used explicitly when making recommendations, despite it appearing to be a very positive piece of work. This further underlines the peripheral presentation of the often crucial relationship based aspects of practice. Simply put, this underlines the importance and applicability of emotional intelligence within a social work relationship, but the nature of the aforementioned contextual pressures can lead to it being compromised and marginalised. This was important in terms of the conceptual framework as it underlined the cogency of including emotional intelligence as a vehicle for thinking about emotions in practice, but emphasised the need to consider the wider influences on emotion and emotional expression. This piece of practice is useful as we move towards the next section of this chapter which seeks to establish a model for social work which would reduce the apparent tensions that exist between the concept of emotions and certain aspects of the construct of the profession.

10.7 - Emotions and social work: a professional model

This chapter has explored the role of emotions within the context of the social work profession. The focus on the word 'professional' emerged from the findings of this thesis as it was common for social workers to use the word professional to explain the lack of appropriateness of using emotions within practice or at least identify it as being an area of tension and

complexity. The notion of being a professional is often underpinned by technical/rational constructs where certainty and tangible outcomes are of high value (Brodie, Cunningham and Plunkett, 2008). When professionalism is viewed through this lens, as it often was within the data, it is natural and understandable that workers then find it difficult to express how/if emotions impact on their practice. This is further underpinned by confusing and contradictory messages from policy and literature about what the profession of social work entails.

The discussion in this chapter has pulled together a range of themes which contribute to an image of a profession where emotions should, and do, have a significant role. So often this type of discussion can edge towards an unhelpful separation of potential models. For example, pointing to a technical/rational model *or* a relationship based model. The findings from this thesis suggest that the separation is neither helpful nor realistic. It has already been argued within the literature review that emotions and rational thought have a useful and inextricable connection. Indeed, regardless of the processes and knowledge brought to bear on social work practice, it is inescapable that the ability to form positive relationships and partnerships with service users is at the core of the activity. Hennessey (2011:17) underlines this when he states that "*we should see social work as a distinctive profession where separating oneself from one's emotions is tantamount to separating oneself from the client*". This quote is in the

context of a relationship based view of practice and resonates strongly with current visions and aspirations of the profession (Munro, 2011).

The findings within this thesis suggest that there are often real or perceived boundaries between the practice of the individual social worker, the organisational messages about the profession and national policy and guidance.

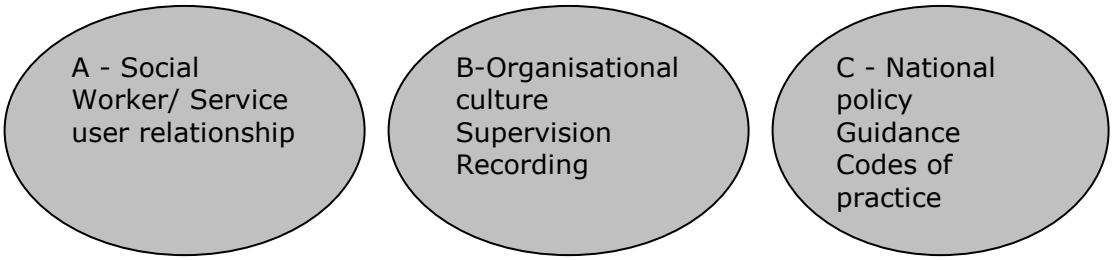

Diagram 9- Facets of professional construct

The diagram above illustrates the key strands that contribute to the realisation of a construct of the profession of social work. Clearly, there is a great deal of detail and further factors within these spheres, but the aim of this diagram is to suggest that these strands often sit beside rather than connected to each other. This leads to the contested nature of the profession and the uncertainty and disjuncture that this gives rise to, as discussed in this thesis. The separation reinforces the sense that these strands can seem at odds with each other or at the very least open to a range of emphases and interpretation. It is clear from my findings in this thesis that these differences in interpretation and experience can arise within team and

supervisory relationships. It is heartening to see that the messages from the Social Work Task Force (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2009) regarding the enhancement of reflective aspects of social work, and the messages from the Munro Report (Munro, 2011) regarding greater autonomy and recognition of the emotional aspects of practice appear to overlap and chime with each other. It is the operationalisation and cascading of these messages that is the crucial aspect of this if the 3 circles above are to meaningfully merge.

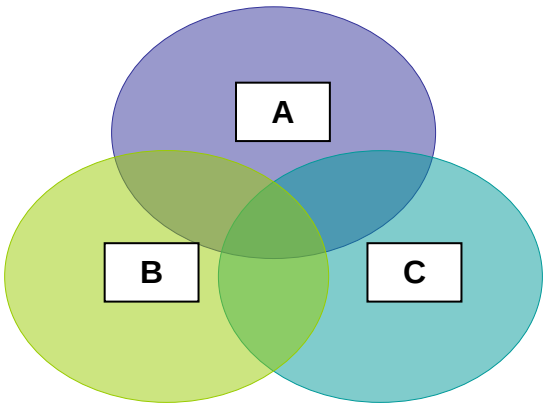

Diagram 10 – The relationship between the facets of the profession

The central intersection of the above diagram is a crucial basis for considering the role of emotions in social work practice. It is the area where the congruent messages about the role of emotions from across the profession come together. By this I mean, the point where the aforementioned polarised strands can cohabit within a construct of the profession. This chapter has highlighted the ethical, sociological, political and

psychological elements that contribute to this area. I will use that intersection as the foundation of a construct of the profession that integrates the emotional elements of practice within it, rather than out-with it.

The model below is intended to locate the social work professional within the context of the complex system of influences with the explicit intention of illustrating the valuable contribution of these influences rather than perpetuating the unhelpful divisions noted above. The focus of this thesis and the model below is about locating the role of emotions within the social work profession and practice. The essence of the conceptual framework of emotions at the heart of this thesis underlines the inescapable role that emotions plays in the reality of practice. What was heartening and intuitive when constructing this model, was that the overlaps between each quadrant were identifiable, realistic and appropriate. The model is based on four key areas of influence. These are:

- Organisational culture
- Social work practice
- Supervision, support and reflection
- Professional frameworks, policy and legislation.

The individual social work professional is placed at the centre of the model with each quadrant explicitly linked in an interdependent process in which each quadrant feeds into and relies upon the others. This is a crucial aspect

of the model, in that the quadrants are developed to enhance clarity rather than to perpetuate the boundaries between them. I have then built the model outwards to identify what I believe to be the key components of each quadrant. As noted above, the key components have a resonance across all four quadrants, which have emerged through the findings within this thesis and which I believe to be a valuable contribution to developing a model that locates emotions within it rather than on the periphery. I will provide a commentary to accompany the model and reflect on the process of its construction.

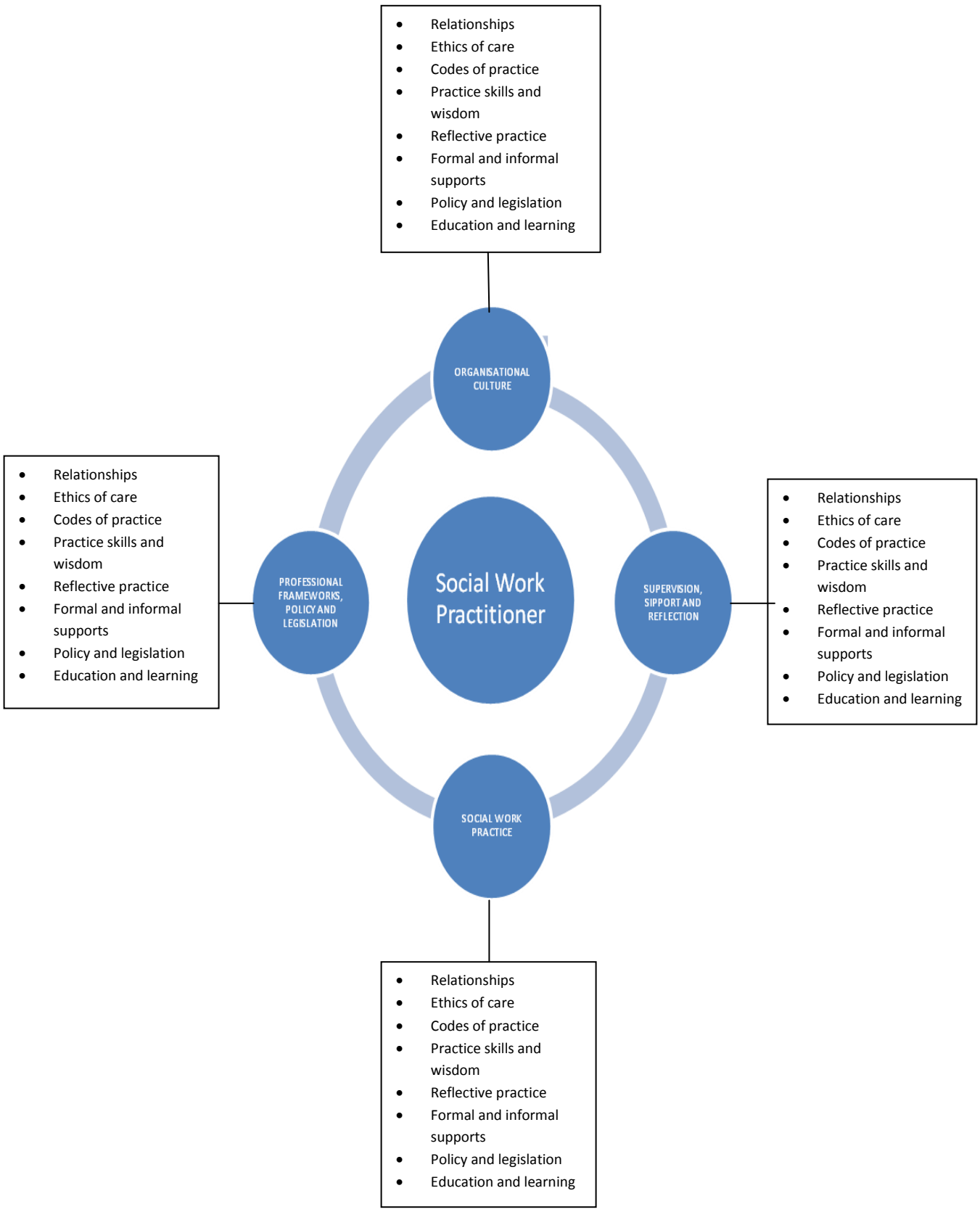

Diagram 11 – Embedding emotions in social work model

The model above draws together the key themes emerging from this thesis and wider social work discourse. I will begin by taking each quadrant in turn and discuss the elements within each one. I will then discuss the relationships between the quadrants and how this interdependent relationship creates a dynamic and flexible construct for the profession.

10.7.1 - Organisational culture

It was clear from the findings of this thesis that organisational culture had a direct impact on the perceived appropriateness of articulating, recording and using emotions in social work practice. The notion of a 'learning culture' is intended to create a space for the value placed on reflection, autonomy and enhancement of practice. Within that construct there should be room for social workers to explore the emotional elements of their practice. By allowing a culture of 'safety' for this to take place, workers would feel able to exercise their emotional intelligence by identifying, managing and using their emotions in practice. This is directly related to adapting the norms and rules which have been seen to influence and encourage the marginalisation of emotions.

This culture of openness and safety in a sense role models key social work values and qualities required within a relationship between worker and service user. This congruency between organisational culture and direct

practice is a crucial aspect of this. As identified earlier in this chapter, there are helpful sources within policy, professional frameworks and legislation to underpin an ethos which values the social work relationship, transparency and increasing autonomy. This should contribute to an organisational sense of the appropriateness of such an approach, whilst also helpfully locating such messages alongside other key aspects of policy which emphasise such factors as the importance of procedures and evidence bases. Once organisations can develop the confidence to see the congruency between existing professional frameworks and the role of emotions and relationships within practice, then it is possible to envisage this having an explicit and implicit impact on the nature of how social work practice is recorded and written in informal and formal settings.

I have identified the presentational aspects of practice and noted the impact of the rules and norms of organisations. The increased congruency between organisational culture and practice reality will *still* provide a social constructed backdrop for how workers feel they should present themselves, but the nature of this presentation will shift towards greater openness and reflection. This brings us back to the notion of a healthy learning organisation which when underpinned by the ethics of care, can manage the uncertain and 'risky' elements of practice by acknowledging and claiming the social work relationship as a central driver within the culture.

10.7.2 - Social work practice

The findings from this thesis provide a complex picture of the nature of relationships between social workers and service users. What is undeniable is that these relationships are seen as central to the activity of being a social worker and the links between 'being professional' and direct practice were a crucial issue. It is important to note that the wider frameworks and policy that underpin the organisational culture are directly linked to the individual worker also. The requirement for professional registration has underlined the explicit relationship between the individual worker and the professional codes and frameworks that they agree to adhere to. Taking this regulatory influence as a starting point, then it is clear that social workers can acknowledge the messages regarding the centrality of relationships with service users as well as expectations about autonomy and reflection. This chimes with the interpersonal aspects of emotions contained within the conceptual framework. When there is greater congruency with organisational messages, then the dramaturgical elements of professional presentation can more easily accommodate this emphasis. If we then link this to our discussion about the ethics of care, we can create ethical space for social workers to locate the importance of their relationships with service users.

The role of emotions within the social work relationship has been clearly illustrated within this thesis. This model underlines the importance for social workers to be able to develop their ability to manage the emotional elements of these relationships and use them to establish open and empathic

communication. This we know to be highly valued by service users and reflected in the codes of practice, and as such the rules and norms in which social workers operate should facilitate this. It is clear that the relationships between social workers and service users are subject to professional boundaries and roles which the findings within this thesis suggest create an uncertainty about the place of emotions. By harnessing the messages noted above about the profession and encouraging the role of emotions within practice, social workers can make comfortable links between professional frameworks and their practice. By this I mean, that the explicit use and acknowledgement of the emotional awareness, management and attunement elements of emotional intelligence can provide a bridge between the frameworks and the reality of practice by countering the previously intangible aspects of emotions.

A key to establishing a view of practice which values the emotions and the centrality of the social work relationship is the congruency between the organisational and national messages about individual autonomy, responsibility and expertise. It is envisaged that this vision of a social work professional is cultivated through the aforementioned learning culture and also is underpinned by the regulatory requirement for continued professional development. This is crucial in terms of giving all parties involved the confidence that greater autonomy and relationship based approaches are underpinned by a vigorous and explicit requirement for reflection and learning. This provides a previously absent rigour to the place of emotions

and relationships, and in doing so the more technicist areas of practice, such as risk assessment, may be integrated more comfortably.

10.7.3 - Supervision, support and reflection

There are very clear connections between the previously discussed organisational culture and the messages that social workers receive about exploring the emotional aspects of their practice in supervision. It is also clear from this thesis that regardless of wider organisational messages, there is scope for supervisors to vary in terms of their interpretation about what supervision involves. It is anticipated that the connectedness of national, organisational and individual professional constructs within this model will mediate against a lack of congruence and consistency between supervisors. An example of this interconnectedness across levels is the notion of role modeling – in this case it is about the organisation, supervisor and social worker all exhibiting an awareness and value on the emotional and relationship aspects of practice. This ties in well with the notion of social consensus suggested by Rosenberg (1990) and the influence this has on emotional expression and understandings. If this flows from a core cultural ethos, then it would be incongruous for supervision to sideline these aspects in favour of managerialist and outcome focused approaches. This clearly links back to the discussion of the socially constructed elements of emotions in practice. There is a strong case to be made for supervisors being able to provide a role modeling approach involving openness, genuineness and

emotional intelligence. This may provide a useful link between management and practice experience/wisdom and move away from a line management orientated approach. The proposed model for discussing and negotiating the focus and balance of supervision will provide a useful tool to establish such approaches to supervision.

The findings of this thesis pointed clearly towards the importance of informal support from colleagues and peers. In its purest form, this would likely continue to exist within any cultural ethos. However, given a culture where the emotional aspects of practice are valued, used and explored then the need for such support may diminish. It would however be a mistake to not build on these findings from the data. The benefits of the shared expertise, the immediacy of the support and the opportunity for reflection would remain attractive and relevant aspects of informal support. Indeed, given a shift in culture, this may be encouraged through the confidence of social workers to access the support and advice that meets their needs. The establishment of physical spaces and semi-structured opportunities for peer support would further develop this important finding. Linked to this discussion, is the idea of peer mentoring schemes which represent a quasi-informal approach to linking peers together. Again, this would not need to be subject to the issues of 'feeling safe' if the culture of the organsiation at all levels explicitly valued the emotional and complex aspects of the relationships with service users. I noted in the previous two quadrants the congruent messages enshrined in professional codes and polices - this should provide a reassuring context for

supervision and other supportive systems to embrace these elements rather than be used to marginalised them.

10.7.4 - Professional frameworks, policy and legislation

The discussion of the preceding 3 quadrants covers much of the ground about the compatibility and importance of national level guidelines and frameworks. In this thesis we have seen examples of where these documents can be used to promote or marginalise the emotional aspects of practice. Within this model it is intended that they set the foundations for a dynamic and evolving culture where the relationship based aspirations can interact positively with the technicist requirements of practice. This is about a cultural shift organisationally and individually as much as it is about the documents themselves. It is clear that the messages that support the role of emotions and relationships in practice exist across the key professional documents, so it is this cultural shift 'on the ground' that needs to move these messages from being contested aspirations to accepted elements of a professional construct.

The presence of social work education at pre and post qualifying stages within this quadrant is crucial. The place of emotions and relationships within practice is evident across the curricula of social work training and enshrined within the professional standards required at qualifying and post qualifying levels. This is an essential element of this model as it reflects the ongoing

cyclical nature of the model where each element should and must feed into each other.

The discussion above highlights the key elements of each quadrant. I chose a model which was fluid and dynamic and emphasised the connectedness of the key elements. It was heartening that the connectedness between these elements was not difficult to ascertain, and the findings from this thesis have helped to shine light on the areas where social workers find the role of emotions most difficult to articulate and express and those areas where they see congruence or the potential for it.

During the development of this model, there were many prototypes which were rejected. One of the words that recur throughout this thesis is the 'balance' between apparently competing factors. For example, the balance between the relationship based aspects of practice and technical/rational aspects. I tried to develop a model which used the metaphor of balance in the form of scales. The strength of this approach was that it accommodated and recognised that apparently opposing elements could be used in combination. The key weakness of this approach was that to only weigh up different factors fell short of removing the boundaries between them. Instead it perpetuates the sense that they co-exist but in an uncomfortable manner. This would in turn fall short of the cultural shift required and potentially leave these strands as contested and open to defensive or narrow interpretation.

10.8 - Conclusion

This chapter has placed the discussion of the role of emotions within the complex landscape of the social work profession. The dramaturgical interpretation proposed allows the role of emotions to be considered in terms of varying contexts, and highlights that there is a presentational facet to this. The metaphorically based model presented provides an explanation of a practice example, but also crucially provides a tool which could be used and applied in practice to help social workers unpick the shifting cultural contexts in which they practice and articulate their practice.

The conceptual framework was revisited and provided a theoretical underpinning to the findings in this thesis. It highlighted the balance between the individual and contextual factors which influence the process of emotional experience, appraisal, meaning and expression. The framework underlined the inescapable contribution emotions have to the way social workers make sense of their experiences within practice and how they in turn respond.

This discussion of context contributed to the foundations of the model which forges explicit links between professional frameworks, practice, organisational culture and practitioner supports to create a vision of the profession which would facilitate and accommodate the emotional aspects of

practice within it. A key aspect of this model is the removal of perceived barriers between these elements which previously created a climate where the emotional aspects of practice were seen in competition or incongruous with the technical/rational aspects of social work. The applicability and credibility of this model is enhanced by the recognition that it is underpinned by *existing* codes, policies and narratives about the profession. The cultural shift required to enact this model requires the explicit acceptance and acknowledgement of the centrality of the social worker/service user relationship and that the emotional content of this relationship is not only inevitable but crucial in terms of associated assessments, interventions and outcomes.

Chapter 11 - Concluding comments

My interest in the role of emotions in social work practice emerged from the following sources:

- My own experience as a social work practitioner working across a broad range of contexts and service user groups.
- The finding from a piece of evaluative research into decision making among students that highlighted the apparent absence of reference to emotions.
- My knowledge of the contested role of emotions within social work and wider literature
- My awareness that when talking to social work students that they reported they experienced and used a range of emotions within their practice learning opportunities.

The conceptual framework proposed within the literature review provided a sound theoretical and definitional basis for considering the role of emotions in social work practice. The data collected in this inquiry underlined the significant role that emotions have in helping social workers understand the presenting issues within their practice. The appraisal elements within the framework were borne out by the numerous examples in which social workers offered interpretations about what practice examples meant to them and in turn the links that these meanings had on consequent behaviour and

actions. In some sense this is unsurprising given the profundity of emotions across all human experience. What was particularly evident was that the emotional responses of social workers were shaped in part by their own personal experiences and constructs, but also by wider professional cultures and norms. This sits comfortably within the conceptual framework, but provided a key area for dissonance between felt and expressed emotions.

The construct of emotional intelligence emerged as a useful and cogent way of considering the potential role of emotions in social work practice, with its strong emphasis on the inter and intra personal aspects of relationships. I have established links between emotions and the messages from service user literature, practice skills literature and professional codes which highlight the importance of the social worker/service user relationship and the need for empathy and emotional attunement within it. This is of course set within the aforementioned professional landscape, and the importance of the reflexive elements contained within my framework are very pertinent in relation to allowing social workers to explore and seek clarity about the role of their emotions in practice.

Having explored the place that emotions and emotional intelligence has within the relevant literature, I was motivated to hear from social workers in current practice contexts about what their views and experiences of the emotional content of their practice was, as it was clear that emotions often

were less visible in social work literature or their presence and validity was contested.

A key finding from my enquiry was that social workers placed great emphasis and importance on the centrality of their relationships with service users and empathic approaches were valued and common. This was counterbalanced by another key theme which related to many social workers expressing doubt and discomfort when considering their emotions in the context of 'being professional'. This discomfort was then vividly linked to the removal or editing of the emotional content of practice from written recordings, reports, formal recommendations and in some cases supervision. It is this gap between the experienced reality of practice and the subsequent articulation of it that is one of the starkest findings. This 'emotional gap' potentially has implications for the transparency, genuineness, honesty, accuracy and communicability of social work practice from workers to all the forums and individuals they are involved with.

The aforementioned gap led me to suggesting a dramaturgical explanation for the presentational aspects of social work practice. Simply put, that the emotional content of practice is felt, experienced and communicated in ways which are in part driven by the cultural rules and norms of the context in which a worker finds themselves. For example, many social workers found emotions congruent with informal discussions with colleagues and yet less congruent with a formal recording of their practice. The key finding

regarding the value of informal support is a useful indicator for potential organisational structures. The centrality of this socially constructionist paradigm was useful in that it moved my key focus from the individual social worker/service user relationship and towards a wider and more fluid context where other variables are at play. For example, another key finding was the variability of the quality and content of supervisory relationships. By recognising the impact of the messages communicated implicitly or explicitly about emotions within such a forum, the foundations of my model which emphasises the inter-related aspects of organisations and practice were laid.

It is heartening that the messages within this thesis are in part echoed or implicitly present in a range of national policies, codes and visions relating to social work. This suggests that social work as a profession may have less distance to travel to achieve the cultural shift required to reduce the disjuncture felt by social workers in relation to expressing and indeed using their emotions in relation to their practice. In many ways, it requires an explicit (rather than implicit or passive) agreement about the centrality of relationships within social work practice to enable and unlock existing knowledge and understandings about the profession to be 'safe' and permissible rather than uncomfortable and incongruent. It is of course impossible to make generalisations across the profession, and there was strong evidence of very positive, reflective and emotionally intelligent practice within this thesis. Indeed, the aforementioned 'emotional gap' would suggest that the reality of the experience and content of social work practice

may contain much greater use of emotions than otherwise recorded or articulated.

The model I presented in the previous chapter was purposefully interlinked in nature and noted that what happens in practice feeds into organisational culture and policy and so on. This interdependent view is important as I do not believe that a 'top down' or alternatively a 'bottom up' cultural shift is likely to prove successful, as it creates too much space for variability, interpretation, bureaucracy and passivity. Rather, the messages already exist across literature, codes, policy, legislation and practice, and as such should be grasped and valued at all levels. There is a challenge and opportunity for pre and post qualifying education and training to play a pivotal role here, which further meshes practice with wider discourses about the profession.

The findings in this thesis reflect the experiences of social workers across a range of practice contexts. The implications for practice and policy are clear in that when the strands of the findings are brought together there is a heartening unity between national narratives, codes of practice, legislation, the experiences of social workers and the voices of service users. I will now discuss the current and potential dissemination of the findings and future research opportunities.

Significant aspects of the literature review have been published in peer reviewed journals during the completion of the thesis (Ingram 2012; Ingram 2012a). This reflects the relevancy of the area of research nationally and internationally. It is in part the universality of the concept of emotions, coupled with the widely held importance of forming relationships with service users in often complex and difficult circumstances that makes the topic so relevant. As an outcome of these publications, the global reach can be illustrated through the request for me to deliver a podcast to the Australian based social work website PodSoc (Ingram, 2012b). The request was inspired by the relevancy within the context of Australian social work and the podcast is accessible globally. This has triggered the early stages of collaboration with a University in New Zealand to explore comparisons with the experiences of social workers between UK and New Zealand as well as exploring differing constructions of the supervisory relationship in social work.

On a national level, the research has attracted interest from the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS), who also requested I deliver a podcast that is aimed at Scottish social work practitioners, educators and students (Ingram, 2012c). A key area for further research is an ongoing relationship with Local Authority X. The model of supervision proposed in this thesis is to be piloted across the local authority in response to the findings of this thesis. This is in conjunction with a series of dissemination events at a range of levels across the local authority on the

findings of my thesis. It is anticipated that this will contribute to organisational change and the messages that workers receive about the place of emotions. A longer term research opportunity may involve repeating the research at a later stage to evaluate any changes achieved.

It is intended that I will achieve publication of papers that contain the data and findings of this thesis. This will be an empirical contribution to the body of knowledge and literature which will underpin the cultural shift identified in the concluding chapter of this thesis and in turn influence the *operationalisation* of narratives such as Munro (2011). Additionally I am currently co-writing a text book on reflective practice which has been commissioned in part due to the emphasis that will place on the emotional aspects of practice. This reflects an opportunity for this thesis and the topic of emotions to be located in a core text book relating to social work and an enthusiasm for such a focus to be published. This again will contribute to the inclusion of emotions in the narrative of social work and crucially within an educative context. This brings me back to my role as a social work lecturer. The focus of my thesis has influenced and informed the development of my teaching within modules across our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. It opens up the opportunity to revisit the research that inspired my interest in the topic to evaluate whether the inclusion of lectures and materials which raise the profile and permissibility of emotions in practice learning and academic work has had an impact.

It is very heartening that the topic of this thesis is proving useful, interesting and relevant. As noted above, there are several current and potential opportunities for future research. Most notably, is the need to identify and evaluate the ways in which cultural change can be achieved and cascaded through the profession in order to realise the importance of including emotions within the professional construct of social work. Finally, I would hope that the dissemination of the findings of this thesis will contribute to the energy and awareness required to keep the relationship based aspects of the social work role at the core of what it is to be a social work professional.

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Appendix 1 – Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

School of Psychology

University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee

Richard Ingram,
School of Education, Social Work and Community Education,
University of Dundee,
Nethergate,
Dundee, DD1 4HN.

6 Dec 2010

Dear Mr Ingram,

Application Number: UREC 10069

Title: Emotional Intelligence and Social Work

Your application has been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Committee, and there are no ethical concerns with the proposed research. I am pleased to confirm that the above application has now been formally approved.

You submitted the following documents:

1. Emotions and Social Work survey draft1	2. Participant Information Sheet interviews
3. Participant Information Sheet questionnaire	4. Research ethics approval supporting info
5. UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE approval ethics form	6. INFORMED CONSENT FORM interviews
7. INFORMED CONSENT FORM text analysis	8. Participant Information Sheet interviews
9. Participant Information Sheet questionnaire	10. INFORMED CONSENT FORM interviews (amended)
11. INFORMED CONSENT FORM text analysis (amended)	

Yours sincerely,

Peter Willatts

Digitally signed by Peter Willatts
DN: cn=Peter Willatts, o=University of Dundee, ou=School of Psychology, email=p.willatts@dundee.ac.uk, c=GB
Reason: I am the author of this document
Date: 2010.12.06 23:53:13 Z

Dr Peter Willatts
Chair, University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee

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Appendix 2 - Emotional Intelligence and Social Work Research Project

Participant Information Sheet – Survey Questionnaire

You are being asked to take part in a research study which seeks to explore the role of emotions and emotional intelligence in social work practice. My name is Richard Ingram, and I am a lecturer in Social Work at the University of Dundee. I am currently completing my PhD. Local Authority X have agreed to give me access to qualified social workers from across - to support and participate in my project.

Purpose of the Research Study

My PhD thesis is concerned with the following research questions:

1. *What role does emotional intelligence have in social work practice?*
2. *Do social workers have an opportunity to explore, consider and use the emotional content of their work to inform their practice?*
3. *What are the challenges, issues and opportunities for considering the role of emotional intelligence in social work practice*

There is an emerging literature relating to the role of emotions and feelings and the impact that these have on the actions and decisions of social workers. A key theme within this literature is the question about whether

emotions are compatible with professionalism. I anticipate that the data to emerge for my research will illustrate how social workers experience their work on an emotional level and the ways in which they manage this. The data will show the ways in which emotional responses to practice may impact on actions and decisions and in turn highlight areas where this is positive and/or challenging.

A key contention of my project is that social work is inherently about emotions and relationships, and that this element of social work practice should be explicit and supported to ensure that social workers are able manage and use their emotions to aid their practice. The intention is that the results from my research will inform future practice and outcomes for service users.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire will ask you a range of questions which will explore your views about the role of emotions in your practice. These include rating statements including the following example:

5. "My emotions help me reach clear decisions"
○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Slightly agree ○ Slightly disagree ○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

The questionnaire also asks you to think about specific aspects of your practice including the following example:

23. I am able to articulate my emotions in the following contexts (mark all that apply)
(select all that apply)

☐ Case notes ☐ Service user contact ☐ Reports ☐ Contact with involved agencies ☐ Case conferences ☐ Informal staff contact ☐ Children's hearings ☐ Court procedures ☐ Supervision ☐ Multi-agency meetings ☐ Internal staff meetings ☐ Other *(please specify)*:

Which forum is most common and why?

Time Commitment

Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. The first phase of the study is the survey questionnaire. Participants are encouraged to answer this as fully as possible, but can choose not to answer specific questions if desired. The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Confidentiality

The survey is hosted by Bristol Online Surveys and as such the data you provide is only accessible to the researcher. We will treat all your information with the strictest confidence, and will omit any data which may compromise your anonymity are the anonymity of others from any output from this study. The data collected is for the sole use of the researcher.

You will be invited to provide your email address should you be willing to be approached for a follow up interview. This will not compromise the confidentiality of your data and there will be no links made between your identity and the data in the research output.

The data from this survey will be held securely and be destroyed within 10 years.

For Further Information

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Appendix 3 - Emotional Intelligence and Social Work Research Project

Survey Questionnaire

Emotions and Social Work

Welcome

Emotional Intelligence and Social Work Research Project

Participant Information

You are being asked to take part in a research study which seeks to explore the role of emotions and emotional intelligence in social work practice. My name is Richard Ingram, and I am a lecturer in Social Work at the University of Dundee. I am currently completing my PhD. Local Authority X have agreed to give me access to qualified social workers from across - to support and participate in my project.

Purpose of the Research Study

My PhD thesis is concerned with the following research questions:

1. What role does emotional intelligence have in social work practice?

2. Do social workers have an opportunity to explore, consider and use the emotional content of their work to inform their practice?

3. What are the challenges, issues and opportunities for considering the role of emotional intelligence in social work practice

Time Commitment

Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. The first phase of the study is the survey questionnaire. Participants are encouraged to answer this as fully as possible, but can choose not to answer specific questions if desired. The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Confidentiality

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You will be invited to provide your email address should you be willing to be approached for a follow up interview. This will not compromise the confidentiality of your data and there will be no links made between your identity and the data in the research output.

The data from this survey will be held securely and be destroyed within 10 years.

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Appendix 4 - Emotional Intelligence and Social Work Research Project

Survey Questionnaire

Emotions and Social Work

Welcome

Emotional Intelligence and Social Work Research Project

Participant Information

You are being asked to take part in a research study which seeks to explore the role of emotions and emotional intelligence in social work practice. My name is Richard Ingram, and I am a lecturer in Social Work at the University of Dundee. I am currently completing my PhD. Local Authority X have agreed to give me access to qualified social workers from across - to support and participate in my project.

Purpose of the Research Study

My PhD thesis is concerned with the following research questions:

1. What role does emotional intelligence have in social work practice?

2. Do social workers have an opportunity to explore, consider and use the emotional content of their work to inform their practice?

3. What are the challenges, issues and opportunities for considering the role of emotional intelligence in social work practice

Time Commitment

Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. The first phase of the study is the survey questionnaire. Participants are encouraged to answer this as fully as possible, but can choose not to answer specific questions if desired. The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Confidentiality

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Appendix 6 - Emotional Intelligence and Social Work Research Project

Survey Questionnaire

Emotions and Social Work

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Appendix 7 - Emotions and Social Work

Background Information
The following questions are mandatory and will be used to enable comparisons within the data collected.

1.

a. Gender
Male Female

b. Age
21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 60+

c. Role title

d. Area of practice (i.e service user group and/or focus of work)

e. Year of social work qualification

f. Length of post-qualified experience

The following statements are concerned with emotions and social work. Please indicate your response to each statement.

2. "Feelings cloud clear thinking and decision making"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

3. "I feel I can remove my emotions from my practice and decsion making"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

4. "I can explore emotions in supervision"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

5. "My emotions help me reach clear decisions"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

6. "Emotions and feelings are compatible with being a social work professional"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

7. "I share my emotions with service users"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

8. "I write about my emotions in formal reports"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

9. "I write about my emotions in case notes"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

10. "I understand the concept of emotional intelligence"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree
Disagree Strongly disagree

11. "Being able to have and express empathy in my practice is important"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree
Disagree Strongly disagree

12. "The key focus of supervision is to discuss the practical aspects of my caseload"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree
Disagree Strongly disagree

13. "I have felt concerned for my personal safety during my practice in the past month"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree
Disagree Strongly disagree

14. "I am able to control my emotions during contacts with service users"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree
Disagree Strongly disagree

15. "Service users share their emotions with me"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree
Disagree Strongly disagree

16. "Service users are able to recognise how I feel"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree
Disagree Strongly disagree

17. "I have avoided contact with service users due to feelings of fear"

Strongly agree Agree Slightly agree Slightly disagree
Disagree Strongly disagree

18. "I base my decisions on theoretical knowledge and an evidence base"

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Slightly agree ○ Slightly disagree
○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

19. "I practice in a manner that is objective and I can remove emotions from the process"

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Slightly agree ○ Slightly disagree
○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

20. "Emotions are at the heart of social work practice"

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Slightly agree ○ Slightly disagree
○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

21. "My feelings contribute to my assessments"

○ Strongly agree ○ Agree ○ Slightly agree ○ Slightly disagree
○ Disagree ○ Strongly disagree

22. Please mark the 3 emotions you have felt most frequently in the past three months of practice.
(select all that apply)

☐ Joy
☐ Anger
☐ Sadness
☐ Happiness
☐ Attraction
☐ Satisfaction
☐ Disgust
☐ Positive
☐ Fear
☐ Dissatisfaction
☐ Confidence
☐ Anxiety

☐ Contentment

☐ Low confidence

☐ Other *(please specify)*:

a. Give one example when you felt this had a positive impact on your practice (please give a reason for your answer stating the emotion concerned).

b. Give one example when you felt this had a negative impact on your practice (give a reason for your answer stating the emotion concerned).

23. I am able to articulate my emotions in the following contexts (mark all that apply)
(select all that apply)

☐ Case notes ☐ Service user contact ☐ Reports ☐ Contact with involved agencies ☐ Case conferences ☐ Informal staff contact ☐ Children's hearings ☐ Court procedures ☐ Supervision ☐ Multi-agency meetings ☐ Internal staff meetings

☐ Other *(please specify)*:

Which forum is most common and why?

24. Please describe your view of the role of emotions within your practice and any issues that you feel are important.

25. The next phase of this research project is to speak with individual practitioners to discuss the themes raised by all the respondents to this questionaire.

If you would be willing to take part in an interview for the next phase of the project, please put your email address in the box below. Your details will be held in the strictest confidence and not be linked to any output from this questionaire.

Many thanks
Richard Ingram

Appendix 8 - Update for Ethics Approval

Plan for semi-structured interviews

Background

The following plan for the second phase of my PhD research project with Local Authority X involves conducting 15-20 semi-structured interviews with qualified social workers. These workers responded to the survey questionnaire in phase 1 and have indicated that they would be willing to take part in an interview. These interviews will last approximately 30 minutes and the areas for questioning have been derived from the data collected through the survey. I have adopted a theoretical sampling approach so that I can target a broad range of social work contexts and viewpoints.

I intend to ask all participants a range of questions that are preset and cover the key cognate areas. I will also ask questions that respond to and develop the answers to these questions and pick up on specific points they raised through their surveys.

Theme 1 – Emotions and social work

1. Describe the types of circumstances that give rise to emotions and the impact this has on you individually and on your actions in practice.
2. Do emotions impact on your assessments and judgments? If so – how do they inform them? If not –how do you remove them from the process?

Theme 2 – Professionalism

1. Are emotions compatible with being professional?
2. Does expressing emotions to service users reflect a degree of transparency, genuineness and empathy?
3. If control of emotions is important – why is this? How is it done?
4. Do you use 'gut instinct' and intuition in your practice?

Theme 3 – Forums for exploring emotions

1. Reports and casenotes appear to be viewed as inappropriate forums – why is this? Are emotions removed or below the surface?
2. Supervision – is it safe to explore emotions in supervision? Is this the core purpose? Is it dependent on the relationship with the supervisor?

3. Informal staff contact – emerged as a key area. Why might this be a favored forum? Is it explicit of covert? Why does informality help?
4. The issue of "safety" was seen as key – why is safety an issue when expressing emotions? What does it mean in your experience?
5. Multi agency communication – do you communicate the emotional aspects of practice here? Can you identify any differences between professions?

Theme 4 - Organisational context and culture

1. What do you understand to be the view of your team about the role of emotions in your practice? Can you think about this at an agency, local authority and national level?
2. How does the context and service user group you work with affect your view of the role of emotions?
3. What might help promote the role of emotions in practice in your context? Would this be desirable in your view?

Richard Ingram April 2011

Appendix 9 -Emotional Intelligence and Social Work Research Project

Participant Information Sheet – Interviews

You are being asked to take part in a research study which seeks to explore the role of emotions and emotional intelligence in social work practice. My name is Richard Ingram, and I am a lecturer in Social Work at the University of Dundee. I am currently completing my PhD. Local Authority X have agreed to give me access to qualified social workers from across - to support and participate in my project.

Purpose of the Research Study

My PhD thesis is concerned with the following research questions:

1. *What role does emotional intelligence have in social work practice?*
2. *Do social workers have an opportunity to explore, consider and use the emotional content of their work to inform their practice?*
3. *What are the challenges, issues and opportunities for considering the role of emotional intelligence in social work practice*

There is an emerging literature relating to the role of emotions and feelings and the impact that these have on the actions and decisions of social workers. A key theme within this literature is the question about whether

emotions are compatible with professionalism. I anticipate that the data to emerge for my research will illustrate how social workers experience their work on an emotional level and the ways in which they manage this. The data will show the ways in which emotional responses to practice may impact on actions and decisions and in turn highlight areas where this is positive and/or challenging.

A key contention of my project is that social work is inherently about emotions and relationships, and that this element of social work practice should be explicit and supported to ensure that social workers are able manage and use their emotions to aid their practice. The intention is that the results from my research will inform future practice and outcomes for service users.

Time Commitment and Location

Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. You will have already completed a survey questionnaire relating to this research project. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes and will be recorded so that your responses can be collected as accurately and comprehensively as possible.

The location of the interview will be at the convenience of the participant. This could be at the place of work of the participant or at the University of Dundee.

Confidentiality

The information collected during the interview will be treated with the strictest confidence and will not be linked to your personal details. I will omit any data which may compromise your anonymity are the anonymity of others from any output from this study. The data collected is for the sole use of the researcher.

Local Authority X has agreed to make available makes documents such as supervision records, case notes and report available. This is entirely voluntary and you may wish not to make any documentation available to the research project. This will not compromise the confidentiality of your data and there will be no links made between your identity and the data in the research output.

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